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THE
COMMEMENTARY

ON THE

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN),

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, Etc., Etc.

BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.



RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89, FARRINGTON STREET.
1889.

A

ON THE BOOK OF

BY

THE REV. W. BURROWS, B.A.

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HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF ESTHER. ---

INTRODUCTION AND PREFACE.

THE BOOK IS CANONICAL.

THE Book of Esther has been said to be not canonical, but the objectors are mainly found in later periods of the Church's history. For the Jews have ever regarded this Book as canonical, and placed it on the same level with the law of Moses. Neither does there appear to be any foundation for the observation made by Baxter, in his 'Saint's Rest,' that the Jews were accustomed to cast this Book to the ground, because the name of God was not in it. If, indeed, any such custom prevailed among the Oriental Jews, it must have been simply to express their hatred of Haman. The Jews believed that, whatever destruction might attend the other sacred writings, the Pentateuch and the Book of Esther would always be preserved by a special providence. This latter statement was the prophetic utterance of Maimonides, and so far it has not been falsified. This is a fact worthy of being carefully considered, that while many other writings have passed into oblivion, this story of Esther is still exerting an influence. The reasons, also, which may account for the preservation of other writings will not suffice to account for the continued existence of Esther; for it is not to be regarded as a standard work on history, though it gives a most faithful account of Persian customs. It does not record the advance of either science or philosophy, and on its pages are not impressed the glowing images of the poet's mind. We may conclude that this little story of a captive Jewish maiden holds its place in the sacred writings because there is a Divine purpose in its preservation.

While its preservation may be due to Jewish patriotism, yet great deference is due to Jewish opinion and to Jewish custom; for to the Jews were committed the oracles of God. They are surely the greatest authorities on this subject, for they lived near the times when the events recorded took place. If then the Jews have put into our hands the Book of Esther as well as the Books of Moses, we

must not let go our hold of those treasures which they have transmitted. This Book is canonical, showing the vanity and instability of earthly glory, giving a sublime example of self-sacrifice, and describing for our instruction a daring faith in the right and the true, as well as a wonderful power of patient endurance under oppression.

It may, however, be objected that the revengeful spirit manifested in the latter part of the Book is not an example for our imitation. We may reply that it is no more an example to be imitated than Persian luxury and effeminacy are to be commended, and no more than the vices of Old Testament saints are to be regarded with favour. While we do not lay great stress on the fact that the Itala or ante-Hieronymian version omits the whole of the nineteen verses of the ninth chapter, we may fairly inquire were they originally in the Book, and wish for Esther's sake that they had never appeared. But this, after all, is characteristic of Scriptural writing. The strong hand of the analyst is present, and nowhere is found unsparing eulogy. The vice that degrades is depicted, though never in attractive colours, as well as the virtue that adorns and elevates. The story of the cruel proceedings in the ninth chapter is no commendation of them; it is a bare recital of facts to make us shrink from even the semblance of evil.

NO DIVINE NAME.

The great objection to the Book of Esther is that the name of God is omitted. So De Wette, who objects to all the other books of the Old Testament because of their theocratico-mythological spirit, condemns this for its want of religion. There may, however, be some force in Keil's observation, that the writer neither wished to depict the persons whose acts he was narrating as more godly than they really were, nor to place the whole occurrence under a point of view alien to the actors and the event itself. It is quite true that the sacred writers never exaggerate; but then Keil's statement implies a studied omission of the Divine name on the part of the author. We do not enter upon the discussion of the authorship of this Book, and cannot decide as to the relative claims of Ezra, Nehemiah, or Mordecai. If, however, the last-named be the author, as is highly probable, we cannot suppose him purposely forbearing to mention the Divine name simply for fear of making the characters depicted more godly than they really were. A more satisfactory reason for the omission is that it is a translated extract from the memoirs of the Persian king. It is very likely that Mordecai, occupying the high position he did in the Persian court, would have free access to such memoirs. Then the scene of the Book is laid in Persian dominions; we are surrounded with a Persian atmosphere, and Persian words are constantly recurring. This instinctive adoption of the fashion of the Persian court may be the reason of the singular omission. Perhaps we may conclude that this omission arose from the increasing dread of using the Divine name which was already manifested at this period of Jewish history.

The Almighty has no need to write his name in order to let us know that his wisdom and power have been controlling the march of human events. The name

of God may be absent, but his power is everywhere visible. Traces of this Divine power may be noticed in the Book of Esther. We may observe Divine Omniscience anticipating threatened evil ; Omnipotence thwarting the designs of a jealous favourite, defeating and overruling the plots of the wicked. We may see God's special providence in bringing forth his chosen instruments to high places in the kingdoms "for such a time as that" at which Esther appeared.

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED.

In commencing the study of Esther it might be felt that it was itself barren for homiletic purposes, and that little help was to be expected from previous labourers. But there is more help than might be expected. Of course all the commentators have handled the Book with more or less of skill, and in more modern times Lange and Keil have brought great critical acumen to the study. The story of Esther has been "glorified by the genius of Handel and sanctified by the piety of Racine ;" vividly but cursorily handled by the descriptive hand of Stanley ; applied to moral uses by Dr. McCrie ; referred to by Heeren as giving the most accurate picture of Persian customs ; and expounded more at large, with that elaborateness which is characteristic of Scotch divines, in discourses by the Rev. George Lawson, Dr. Davidson, and others whose names will be given where quoted. We shall make use of all previous productions, remembering that our work is to be the homiletic expositor of the Book. Its study is interesting, and much useful material may be here found for the pulpit. Pearls lie deep ; and, to the faithful and diligent seeker, pearls of Divine truth will be discovered in every part of the Divine Word. Rawlinson tells us that by the Jews this Book is called *Megillath Esther*, "the roll of Esther," or, more shortly, *Megillah*, "the roll," since it was always written on a separate roll, which was read through at the feast of Purim. We must carefully unwind the roll and attentively read the inscriptions in order that we may find that this Scripture too is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And this we shall attain if the inspiring Spirit direct in our reading, as he directed in the writing of the Book. Come then, O gracious and holy Spirit, bless our labours, and make them productive of moral enlargement.

CHAPTER I.

PERSIAN SPLENDOUR.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. Ahasuerus] Heb. Ahashverosh. Prince, chief. A name given in Scripture to Cambyses, the son of Cyrus, and to Astyages, king of the Medes (Ezra iv. 6 ; Dan. ix. 1). **India to Ethiopia]** describes the king's dominion, but does not definitely fix the date of his reign. The hundred and twenty-seven provinces indicate the *σατραπιαι*. **2. Shushan the palace]** The king's favourite winter residence. Shushan the lily, the rose, the joy. **3. The power of Persia]** The king's body-guard. The princes, the pashas, or governors of those provinces. **4. An hundred and fourscore days]** We are not obliged to conclude that all or any of the governors were present during the whole period of festivity.—*Raeclinson*. **5. Garden of the king's palace]** The kingly palace, or series of houses, was situated, in Oriental manner, as is customary also to-day, in a large park.—*Lange*. **6. White, green, and blue hangings]** Rather, "where was an awning of fine white cotton and velvet." White and blue, or violet, were the royal colours of Persia. **Beds of gold and silver]** Couches or sofas on which the guests reclined at meals. The cloths were woven with gold and silver threads. **7. Royal wine]** A very costly wine, called the Chalybonian wine, that the Persian kings used to drink. **12. Vashti refused to come]** It was regarded as something unheard of if the queen appeared in public unveiled.—*Lange*. Vashti means the best. **13. Which knew the times]** Astrologers and magicians ; generally to be learned. **14. The seven princes]** refers in the present case to the seven Amhaspands, in others to the days of the week, or the seven planets. **22. According to the language of the people]** Obscure. The native tongue of the head of the house to be used in the family.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1, 2.

TIME'S DOINGS WITH HUMAN GREATNESS.

Ahasuerus is gone, his royal city has perished, and even his stately palace has left behind only a few insignificant traces. But the simple story of Esther survives. Palaces of marble, as well as mansions made of the less enduring brick, strangely vanish. Strong fortifications disappear. Wonderful it is that material structures seem less enduring than insubstantial thought structures. Suggestive it is that the man Ahasuerus moves a formless shadow across the stage, while his doings and external greatness are vividly represented.

I. This monarch's unknown individuality. The proceedings of Ahasuerus are only such as might be expected from any Persian monarch of that period, possessing irresponsible power, invested with all the signs of extended dominion, surrounded by courtiers who rendered indiscriminate flattery, steeped in luxury and in frivolity, and like one of the governors in India, who told the native princes that they were but dust beneath his feet. The record of the doings of Ahasuerus, therefore, cannot give positive information as to his personality. His position in the Persian dynasty cannot be undoubtedly ascertained ; but his place in the Divine economy is certain. The very weakness of his character was a buttress for the Jewish nation. His love of luxury turned out to the "enlargement" of the Jewish people. His immortality is that of those who are saved from oblivion by the greatness of others. Time sooner or later obscures the epitaph. The name written may be Ahasuerus, and future generations will fail to discover the person indicated. The advancing time will weave its mists about the name, and the individual will be lost in darkness. But a Divine book of remembrance is kept, and there the names of the righteous are written in

characters of *ever-enduring light*. Their names shall shine in the all-revealing splendours. Let men strive to work in harmony with, and in furtherance of, all Divine purposes.

II. This monarch's individuality is only declared by the extent of his material kingdom. "This is Ahasuerus which reigned," &c. His kingdom may be measured by the land surveyor and described by the historian. It extended from India to Ethiopia. He embraced in his rule the borders of India on the one side, and Egypt on the other—an extent of country about two thousand five hundred miles in length. He possessed some of earth's loveliest lands. The fertilizing waters of the Nile left rich deposits on one portion of his territory, and another almost reached the sources of the sacred Ganges, while the Euphrates washed the walls of Babylon, and was fed by streams that flowed near the royal city of Susa. The Black Sea, famous in the history of modern conflicts, and the Caspian, were partly included in the territories over which he reigned. Lands and cities of historic fame were compelled to pay him tribute, and some of the noblest races on earth obeyed his commands. But the moral king is nobler, and has a more *extensive and a more permanent kingdom*. Even the material universe is the believer's possession, intended for his spiritual development. Death strips the earthly king of his royal robes, and leaves him unthroned; but death lets the moral king into a larger sphere, and the results of his earthly conquests he will enjoy in heaven. The kingliest men have owned only a few feet of land, and sometimes not enough land for a tomb, according to short-sighted views of ownership.

III. This monarch's greatness consisted in external display. The throne on which the king sat was a chair made of gold, adorned with a costly carpet, upon which none might sit, on pain of death. There was also a footstool of gold. The king held a golden sceptre in his right hand. Close behind stood an eunuch bearing a fan, and with his mouth covered, for fear his breath should be offensive to the mighty monarch. Such are the pomp and circumstance with which Oriental monarchs endeavoured to separate themselves from, and raise themselves above, their fellow-creatures. This is greatness in the estimation of the children of this world. But true greatness is superior to mere gorgeous externals. The one disappears when the showy livery is removed, but the other abides through all changes. Lazarus was great in his rags; Dives was mean in his purple and fine linen. A great soul ennobles the meanest surroundings.

IV. This monarch's proud position is not to be envied. There are many who would regard Ahasuerus with envy, as, amid a group of attendants, he paced those terraced heights on which the palace of Shushan was erected, as he watched the gentle gliding of the sweet waters of the Euleus, as he listened to the music of pipers and harpists, as he pleased himself with the natural and artistic beauties of the scene, and as he gazed upon the flat and fertile plains that stretched at the base of the royal palace. The riches both of art and of nature seemed to combine in order to make existence pleasant. But no human lot is without its admixture of pain. From the high places of the earth we catch the echo of those wailing cries that mingle with the mocking sounds of revelry. Kings are but men, and their hearts too are touched by the painful hand of sorrow. The inscription over an imaginative palace is, "Here is the abode of everlasting pleasures and content." But no such inscription can be truthfully placed over the gates of any earthly palace, and certainly it will not describe Shushan the palace. Happy he who wisely keeps the palace of his soul, and finds there the elements of true gladness.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1, 2.

Ver. 1. *Ahasuerus*. The difficulty of stating positively who was the Ahasuerus spoken of in this passage is almost insuperable. The nearest approach to a settlement of the question is the statement that Ahasuerus was one of the Persian monarchs who lived about the time of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, and must have been one of those monarchs; for only those three are described by Herodotus as possessing the extent of territory attributed to them in the Book of Esther. Most of our modern critics decide that Ahasuerus is Xerxes, and this conclusion is said to be fortified by a resemblance of character. As Xerxes scourged the sea, and put to death the engineers of his bridge because their work was injured by a storm, so Ahasuerus repudiated his queen Vashti because she would not violate the decorum of her sex, and ordered the massacre of the whole Jewish people to gratify the malice of Haman. Now Herodotus is evidently the father of fables as well as the father of history. In the book Polyhymnia, from which the above instance of foolish conduct is quoted, Herodotus tells us of some prodigies which fairly lead us to doubt his trustworthiness. And we may well agree with Mitford when he affirms that some of the anecdotes related by Herodotus "are utterly inconsistent with the characters to whom they refer. Among the latter I should reckon the ridiculous punishment of the Hellespont by stripes and chains, together with executions equally impolitic as inhuman, and repugnant to what we learn on best authority of the manners of the Persians." The assembly spoken of by Herodotus as called by Xerxes in order to deliberate concerning the Grecian war does not resemble that great feast and assembly which was held by Ahasuerus in Shushan the palace, and which lasted an hundred and fourscore days. Those frightful dreams which Xerxes is said to have had at this period do not speak to us at least of the merit of Ahasuerus in Shushan. This luxury and splendour only seem to

point to the Persian greatness which culminated about this period. The two narrations—the one given by Herodotus as to Xerxes, and the other in the Book of Esther as to Ahasuerus—may appear to agree in point of time, but do not necessarily as to the nature of the events recorded. There is surely an *a priori* argument in favour of those historians who lived near the time when the events took place which they record, and who had better means of knowing the characters and events whom and which they describe than later authors. It is a fact to be considered that throughout the Book of Esther in the LXX. Artaxerxes is written for Ahasuerus, and that the apocryphal additions of the Book of Esther give this name. Josephus, also, being such a painstaking historian, did not write Artaxerxes for Ahasuerus without good reason. The name Ahasuerus sets forth the dignity of the man rather than distinguishes him from others. It is a general title of the Persian kings, as Pharaoh, Ptolemy, and Cæsar were general names for rulers of other countries. Why should we institute a painful comparison between the believer who is said not to own a foot of land, and the licentious monarch who reigns over one hundred and seven and twenty provinces? For, it is truly observed, some of the vilest men possessed all the great and large dominions of the Persian empire. But if God has bestowed true faith, unfeigned love, and unaffected humility, he has bestowed treasures of inestimably greater value than all the possessions of Xerxes or of Nero. A man may rule over an extensive kingdom, and yet be a slave; for lusts are tyrannical masters. A man may be a slave in outward condition, and yet be the noblest freeman, the grandest king of all. He is royal who is a member of that kingdom which is to extend from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth, which in fact is to include all nations. Other kingdoms shall fail, but Christ's kingdom of love shall ever endure.

Monarchs will be still adding, and although a man were monarch of the whole world, yea, and had command of the moon and the stars, yet would he still be peeping beyond them for more, more.—*Trapp*.

An overgrown kingdom which in time would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it gained them. If such a vast power be put into bad hands it is able to do so much the more mischief.—*M. Henry*.

Ver. 2. Sitting is a posture common to judges and kings, but more particularly characteristic of the kings of Persia. The Persian kings are always painted as sitting on a throne under a lofty canopy. This is true of them even in the time of war, and in their journeys. Xerxes, indeed, was present in the battles sitting; thus it was at Thermopylae, according to Herodotus, and at Salamis, according to Plutarch.—*Lange*.

This monarch's palatial residence. Shushan is mentioned in three of the sacred books—Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel—as well as by profane writers. Originally it was the capital of the province called in Scripture Elam, and by the classical writers sometimes Cissian, and sometimes Susis, or Susiana; and was situated on the banks of the river Eulai, or Eulæus. Daniel refers to it in the account of his vision as forming part of the Babylonish empire. Its foundations are said to have been laid even before the time of Chedorlaomer. The remains found on the supposed site point to a very remote past. It was comprehended in the Persian empire in the time of Cyrus or Darius, and to the latter is generally given the credit of being the founder or builder of the great palace described in the Book of Esther. It was chosen by the Persian monarch as the capital of his empire on account of its vicinity to Persia, its climatic advantages, and the great excellence of its water. The circumference of Shushan, exclusive of some outlying mounds, was about three miles; but little more than the name of the city remains. The bases of a few columns, having upon them inscriptions which are deciphered with difficulty, are all

that is now left of this proud city. Shushan means the lily, the rose, the joy—a name given on account of the fertility of the country, and the abundance of lilies that flourished in the district. This lily no longer flourishes, this Narcissus no more emits its fragrance; the joy and pride of the nations has fallen from its eminence. Thus the flowers of earth perish, but the celestial flowers bloom for evermore. Our Beloved is as the lily of the valley and the rose of Sharon, and he shall evermore unfold his loveliness and emit his Divine fragrance.

The palace of Shushan was one of the architectural wonders of its day, and its size and its magnificence would have attracted considerable attention in modern times. In visiting the ruins of our ancient abbeys we are astonished at the evidences of minuteness and of massiveness which still survive in those gigantic and yet graceful structures. But more profound emotions of sublimity are produced by visiting the ruins of Persepolis, which corresponded to the palace of Shushan in great measure, and from which at least we must gather our conception of what the Shushan palace was like, for nearly all the ruins of the latter have disappeared. In speaking of Persepolis, Porter observes, "Nothing can be more striking than the view of its ruins; so vast and so magnificent, so fallen, mutilated, and silent; the court of Cyrus, and the scene of his bounties; the pavilion of Alexander's triumph, and the awful memorial of the witness of his power." The first object which presented itself was a columned hall of the largest size, which has not been rivalled in space or in beauty by any building either ancient or modern, not even by Egyptian Carnac or Cologne Cathedral. On three sides of the hall were vast porches, supported by twelve columns, while the great central hall had thirty-six, which were a little over sixty feet high. These columns were all fluted, and surmounted by capitals formed into the shape of the heads of bulls, or horses, or wild asses. Heeren supposes these pillars to have supported a roof of cedar, but some

authorities doubt whether this large hall could have had a roof. In the grounds we see on one side what is called the queen's house, and on the other the king's house. In looking at the whole group we may see terrace rising above terrace, and building above building, to the height of two hundred feet above the level of the plain. Fabulous creatures in stone frowning like mighty sentinels; the terraces graced with trees, shrubs, and flowers of rich luxuriance, indicating the fertility of the country as well as the skill of the cultivators. Evidences there were on all sides that the wealth, genius, and productive power of that vast empire had been collected and concentrated to the erection and adornment of the stately pile of buildings.

Shushan the palace. The king had a royal establishment in several cities, but at the time here referred to it was

in Shushan, which was a favourite spring residence.—*Lange*.

In this city was the famous palace of Cyrus, which was adorned with marble walls, golden pillars, and great store of precious stones, shining as so many stars from the roof and sides of it, to the dazzling of the eyes of the beholders.—*Trapp*.

Time sadly overcometh all things, and is now dominant, and sitteth upon a sphinx, and looketh unto Memphis and old Thebes; while his sister Oblivion reclineth semi-somnous on a pyramid, gloriously triumphing, making puzzles of Titanian inscriptions, and turning old glories into dreams. History sinketh beneath her cloud. The traveller, as he paces amazedly through those deserts, asketh of her who builded them, and she mumbleth something, but what it is he heareth not.—*Anonymous*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 3—5.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE DIVINE.

Such immense assemblages, and feasts for such a lengthened period, were not uncommon to Oriental monarchs. A similar feast was given by the Emperor of China to the whole population of the province.

I. Human preferences. We have not the means of positively declaring why Ahasuerus gave this great feast. The story of Esther simply records the giving of the feast in order to impart unity to the account, and as being necessary to the explanation of after events. But there is good in all; and if there was generosity in this vain and ambitious monarch, it is seen in the fact that he included the lowest as well as the highest in his festive arrangements. But greater still is the Divine benevolence; for Ahasuerus first entertained the magnates, and then condescended to the lowest, while to the poor is the gospel preached. Moral reforms seem first to touch the "small," and then to affect the "great." In primitive times the poor welcomed the gospel, and gladly sat down at the feast of Divine love. What a pity that in these days the poor, to a very large extent, appear to shut themselves out from the gospel feast! The problem now to solve is how to extend the beneficent influences of Christianity beyond the circle of the respectable classes. Ahasuerus surrounded himself with his body-guard—a large and imposing retinue—and with the pachas or governors of the provinces. These were accounted great; but God finds the Divinely great amongst the humanly small. Human distinctions are reversed in Divine estimation. The preferences of earth are not the preferences of heaven. The great of this planet will look small, and the small of human reckoning appear great, when placed beneath the truer light of a sublimer sphere.

II. Human limitation. Ahasuerus gave a feast which lasted one hundred and eighty days at the most; and, according to some authorities, for only seven days. It is highly probable that the same guests did not continue for the whole period of

the feast. Each day there would be fresh arrivals. When one company was feasted, another took up the vacated couches in the festive hall. However prolonged the earthly feast, it must at last terminate. The resources of the hosts are exhausted; the capacities of the guests fail; the viands become corrupt; the banqueting-hall crumbles to ruins; the festivities are rudely interrupted; the songs of gladness give place to cries of sadness. But the feast of Divine love is for all time and for all eternity. The resources of the Omnipotent cannot be exhausted. The word limitation can find no place in the celestial vocabulary.

III. Human infelicity. Earthly feasts too prolonged bring damage to the body, sadness and distress to the spirit. The soul of man cannot find in sensual pleasures its true good. In this book we find that merriment was the direct cause of melancholy. Our greatest earthly joys are too often the sources of our deepest sorrows. Pleasure and pain are closely related, and the one is the parent of the other. The harp hangs upon the willows, and though no hand touch the strings, it gives forth a mournful strain. But Divine joys do not end in tears. The pleasures of heaven are free from all attendant pains. The golden harps give forth no wailing sounds. The feasts of the true Paradise are satisfying; and the deeper we drink of the Divine springs, the more satisfaction do we experience. Therefore saith Divine love, "Feast, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."

IV. Human incompleteness. The feast was given in the court of the garden of the king's palace. A very beautiful place, no doubt. We can picture its splendours, both natural and artificial. Its fruits luscious, its flowers beautiful in form and in colour, its aromas sweetly fragrant, and the whole aspect of the scene enchanting; but our best earthly gardens are incomplete. Man makes a beautiful garden, and is said to have made the wilderness smile; but the smile only conceals the silent sigh. There is a gloomy grotto in every earthly garden. The lilies fade, the oaks and lindens and acacias are blasted; the very fragrance becomes offensive. In God's garden the trail of the serpent is not visible, the reproving question is not heard, the marks of defect are nowhere seen. It is perfect and complete; the result of unerring wisdom, the expression of boundless resources.

Here learn—(a) *Immoderate pleasure causes sorrow.* Jesus was present at a marriage-feast, and not as a reproving spirit. The Divine love spreads a table in the wilderness covered with sweetest viands, while his songsters raise their joyful notes at the feast. But in the bitterness of the recoil from excessive pleasure, we say of laughter, It is madness, and of mirth, What doeth it? (b) "He that is of a merry (or cheerful) heart hath a continual feast." The appetite for more develops with the increase of the supply. Nature requires little, and grace less. Oh that we could reach the Apostle's sublime altitude—"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

A FEAST FOR ALL PEOPLE.

This was a glorious feast. But in Isa. xxv. 6, 7 we have a description of one which far surpasses it. It is the promise of a feast made by God, furnished with the very best provision, for *all* people, and, therefore, a feast in which *we* have an undoubted interest. That we may see how much better the Lord's feast is than Ahasuerus's feast, let us consider the Lord's feast, and the benefits which result from attending it.

I. The Lord's feast described. In connection with the feast we notice—1. The place where it is made. Ahasuerus made his in the palace garden; God makes his in a mountain (Isa. xxv. 6). That means the Church of God on earth, composed of his penitent, believing, grateful, and obedient subjects. This collective body, or community of God's people, is called by Moses "the mount of the Lord" (Numb. x. 33). (1) *The Church of God on earth, like a mountain, is generally conspicuous.* It cannot be hid. It is seen by God with gracious

complacency; it is seen by *angels* with joy, and affectionate care; it is seen by *men* with avowed contempt; it is seen by *devils* with envy and malice. They envy the honours of this mountain; they hate its sovereign, and are manifestly opposed to its government. (2) *Hence, like a mountain, it is peculiarly exposed to storms*—storms of persecution, temptation, opposition. (3) *But notwithstanding those hostile assaults, like a mountain, it remains immovably secure.* God has promised to watch, to be present with, and to keep it. (4) *Like a mountain, it is extensively beneficial.* A mountain is a shelter from storms; so is the Church. Do the treasures of heaven drop on the mountains, and break forth in springs for the benefit of man? So the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. But let us observe—2. The feast itself. This is undoubtedly the gospel feast. It is sometimes called a *marriage* feast, a great supper, &c. This leads us to observe—3. The provision with which the feast is furnished. “Fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.” The provisions thus described are such as must be—(1) *Carefully selected.* (2) *Dearl purchased.* (3) *Supremely excellent and highly gratifying.* 4. The guests for whom this feast is promised. “For all people.” (1) *This implies that all mankind need the blessings of the gospel.* (2) *That those blessings are obtainable by all those who come for them.*

II. The benefits which result from attendance at this feast. These we find are great and various. As—1. The removal of darkness. 2. Deliverance from sorrow. The Lord will wipe away all tears; all tears of guilty distress, of suffering mortality. 3. Exemption from eternal death.

Application:—1. On coming to this feast, as Christ commands, confidently expect what he promises. 2. When received at this feast, let your whole deportment be answerable to your entertainment. Be humble, thankful, charitable.—*Sketches of Sermons.* 1838.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 3—5.

Ver. 3. Banquets on so grand a scale, and extending over so great a period, have not been unfrequently provided by the luxurious monarchs of Eastern countries, both in ancient and modern times. The early portion of this festive season, however, seems to have been dedicated to amusement, particularly an exhibition of the magnificence and treasures of the court.—*Port. Commentary.*

The description of this feast corresponds to the statement of ancient Persian luxury and magnificence which the Greek authors have sent down to us. The vast numbers entertained at their feasts, as well as the long continuance of these feasts, are points noticed by ancient writers.—*Killo.*

Such a feast, as that all other feasts were but hunger to it, whether we regard the number of the guests, the largeness of the preparation, or the continuance of time; yet it had an end. But so hath not the feast of a good conscience.—*Trapp.*

A world of meat; every meal was so

set on as if it should have been the last; yet all this long feast hath an end, and all this glory is shut up in forgetfulness.—*Bishop Hall.*

Epicurus himself, who placed happiness in pleasure, enjoined temperance as a necessary means of this pleasure. An author of our nation justly observes, that when a great multitude of alluring dishes are set upon a table, a wise man may see palsies, apoplexies, and other grievous or mortal distempers lurking amongst them.—*Rev. Geo. Larson.*

It is said of the father of Louis XV., king of France, that when his preceptor one day was speaking of this feast of Ahasuerus, and wondered how the Prince of Persia could find patience for such a long feast, he replied, “That his wonder was how he could defray the expense of it.” He was afraid that the provinces would be compelled to observe a fast for it. On another occasion the same prince said, that he did not understand how a king should taste unmingled joy at a feast, unless he could invite all

his subjects to partake; or unless he could be assured, at least, that none of them would go supperless to bed.

Great pleasure is often followed by equally great displeasure. Occasions of joyous feasting commonly end in sorrow. —*Starke*.

Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, and the enjoyment of one's self and a friend, than the banquet of wine with all the noise and tumult that needs attend it. —*Matthew Henry*.

Ver. 5. As the king could not furnish a house for so many guests as were invited to his entertainment, pavilions were prepared for them in the palace garden.

Lest the glory of this great king might seem like some coarse picture, only fair afar off, after the princes and nobles of the remote provinces, all the people of Shushan are entertained for seven days, with equal pomp and state. The spacious court of the palace is turned into a royal hall, the walls are of rich hangings, the pillars of marble, the beds of silver and gold; the wine and vessels strive whether should be richer; no man drank in worse than gold. The attendance was answerable to the cheer, and the freedom matched both. —*Bishop Hall*.

This feast was held, not in the outlying grounds, but in the centre of the group of buildings. And the curtains around this central group of buildings would admit the light and secure warmth, —an arrangement most desirable for a spring residence.

Garden. The world has had a great many beautiful gardens; but not any of them can be compared to the garden which Christ has in his Church. The Church may be compared to a

garden, because, 1. It is a place of the choicest flowers. There are sunflowers, snowdrops, lilies. 2. It is a place of the most select fruits. There are the fruits of patience, charity, integrity. —*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

The king made a feast unto all the people. This was not amiss, so that care was taken that no irregulars were found amongst them; for kings should carry themselves towards their people as kindly as parents do toward their children, and shepherds toward their sheep. Are they not, therefore, *patres patrie*, fathers of their country and shepherds of their people?

Both unto great and small. Pell-mell, one with another, to show his liberality; which he might better have bestowed in another way than belly cheer, and such open-house keeping to all comers without difference. —*Trapp*.

Seven days. Too long together to be a feasting, sith at such times men are apt to exceed and outlash; eating that on earth that they must digest in hell, and drowning both bodies and souls in wine and strong drink, as Richard III. did his brother Clarence in a butt of Malmsey. —*Trapp*.

1. The power of a nation is not its wealth. As individuals, so nations have been ruined by growing too rich. 2. The power of a nation is not its fortifications. Babylon had high walls and good defences, but was overthrown by the Persians. The power of a nation is its virtuous people. Thus—4. The security and peace of nations consist not in magnificent feasts, but in the good government of its people, the happiness of its people, the education and enlightenment of its people. —*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 4, 6.

SELF-GLORIFICATION.

We speak of Oriental magnificence and Oriental love of display, and do not sufficiently remember that there is an English love of display. During the last few years wealth has increased in England; and with the increase of wealth there has grown an increase of ease, of luxury, and of display. Class has vied with class. The order of the day has been ruinous extravagance. The consequence

has been disaster and infamy. Pride must have a fall, and the English nation must experience yet further troubles if it does not seek a true reformation of manners.

I. This monarch was able to make a proud display, and to gratify the Oriental taste for magnificence. The wealth possessed by the Persian monarchs at this period must have been vast, for at the commencement of every year the princes came with their costly presents from the different provinces of the extensive empire. The satrapy of Cilicia furnished a goodly number of horses as its yearly tribute. From another part came a long train of large trays placed on men's heads, on which were shells, stuffs of all sorts, and pearls; then many trays filled with sugar and sweetmeats; and after that many mules laden with fruits. A third sent a string of one hundred camels, and as many mules, together with weapons of war. And so from all the widely extended provinces the gifts came. And even India furnished a tribute, consisting of vessels filled with gold, and of ornaments, and of wild asses which were prized for the purpose of stocking the royal parks. It is not, therefore, astonishing that Ahasuerus was able to give the numerous guests "drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance." The vastness of his resources may also be still more clearly apprehended from a consideration of the fittings and furniture as thus described:—"White stuff variegated with purple hangings, fastened with cords of byssus and purple to silver rings and marble pillars; couches of silver and gold upon a pavement of malachite and marble, and mother-of-pearl, and tortoise-shell." The couches prepared for the guests were covered with cloth woven of gold and silver thread, and were placed upon a tessellated, mosaic-like floor. These imposing white marble pillars were stationary, and formed a permanent part of the palatial residence. How magnificent! Shall we not condone his vanity as he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty? No wonder that he was exalted with pride. How much to feed the spirit of self-glorification!

II. But this proud display was a contemptible exhibition. For it showed (a) *The materialism of his nature.* No mention here of moral riches. He showed the riches of his kingdom, but never spoke of the virtue of his people. The external was magnified; the internal was dwarfed. It might be, so far, refined materialism; but in any shape materialism is degrading. (b) *The narrowness of his view.* Great as was the magnificence of this monarch, greater still, by far, is the Creator's magnificence as seen even in this material universe; and this world is but a small part of his empire. Bring together the treasures and glories of all the palaces and mansions of earth; and, being only a small selection, they but tend to show to the reflective mind the vastness of nature's resources. But all this the monarch's mind did not perceive. Self bounded the range of his vision. He was contracted in his views. (c) *The childishness of his spirit.* The beautiful simplicity of the child is seen in its display of its possessions; but the ignoble childishness of the monarch is seen in the display of his material riches. The Almighty does not make a parade of the riches of his glorious kingdom; but permits them to speak for themselves. Yea, he seems to conceal his treasures; and all goodly pearls reveal themselves only to diligent seekers.

III. This proud display has a sorrowful aspect. He showed his riches . . . many days. The display only lasted for days after all. This sorrowful word is written on all our earthly possessions. Days mark the period of our stewardship; for all are stewards. The end of the days, though many, even an hundred and fourscore, will come at last. And then whose shall these things be? Then what account will the poor, elated, flattered monarchs be able to give of their stewardship? Let us then (a) follow the example of the Divine King and not of the human. Let not vain breath be spent in blowing the glorifying trumpet. Pearls will be found. Let our wealth—material, intellectual, or moral—speak for itself.

Let the light of goodness shine out clearly, and then we shall not need to say, *See how brightly we illuminate the universe.* (b) Let us see the warning word "days" inscribed on all our possessions, on our golden thrones, on our palaces of marble, and over our gardens of delight. This will abate our pride; this will remove the spirit of self-glorification. He that possesses spiritual riches, the gift of Christ Jesus, will find his "days" merge into the bright, unending day of heaven.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 4, 6.

Ver. 4. What is greatness if it be not showed? And wherein can greatness be better shown than in the achievements of war and the entertainments of peace?—*Bishop Hall.*

This is instanced by the Holy Ghost, to set forth the pride and vanity of this great monarch, abusing God's gifts to his own ambition, and priding himself in that wealth which had been gotten by the hard labour of his poor subjects.—*Trapp.*

This was vainglory, an affectation of pomp to no purpose at all; for none questioned the riches of his kingdom, nor offered to vie with him for honour. If he had showed the riches of his kingdom, and the honour of his majesty, as some of his successors did, in contributing largely towards the building of the temple, and the maintaining of the temple-service, it would have turned to a much better account.—*Matthew Henry.*

Poor man! he little knew wherein true riches, glory, and royalty consisted.

The princes feasted; the provinces would have to fast.

Upon a pavement of red and blue. These are those things that make us desirous to live long here. Will these save a man from sickness? Do not these outward gauds and gaieties carry away the heart from the love of better things?—*Trapp.*

Wealth, honour, and draperies are poor things to put a dying head upon.

If the feast of an earthly monarch be so magnificent, what will be the feast of the King of kings in heaven? There will be unfading splendour, and pleasures without exhaustion or satiety. All things are ready for this feast; we are all invited. May we accept the gracious invitation, seek and find the wedding

garment, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb.—*Henry and Scott.*

1. *The folly of building upon "riches" and "honour."* It is idolatrous in principle. It puts the creature in the place of the Creator. It looks no higher than this life. God, heaven, eternity, are all sacrificed for pleasure. It is destructive in its issues. "A house on the sand." "A broken cistern." "A lifeless tree."

2. *The wisdom of building upon the true riches.* It is pious in its principle. It refers all to God. Exalts him in the soul, and renders to him his just honour. It is elevated in its aim. Heaven—eternity. Mean is the ambition of the man who aims at universal empire when compared with the Christian's aim. He aims at the possession and enjoyment of God.—*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

An ancient father, when he first set his foot in Rome, at that time the mistress and wonder of the world, made this pious observation: "If an earthly kingdom is so glorious, how glorious must the new Jerusalem be!" If you account those men happy who were feasted in the royal gardens of Shushan, how blessed must those men be who are admitted to an eternal feast in Christ's Father's House! Gold and silver and pearls are but poor emblems of its celestial splendour.—*Rev. G. Lawson.*

The owner of this must have been very much prospered. 1. Prosperity should lead to praise. 2. As a matter of fact, prosperity is often hostile to the spiritual life. 3. To permit the pleasures of life to absorb our attention is degrading to the nature entrusted to us by God. 4. It is destructive to the happiness which thus is mistakenly sought. *Application:* 1. To the rich and prosperous: be on your guard. To

the poor; murmur not that prosperity has been denied you; wealth is the eternal ruin of many.—*B. Thompson.*

It is not your riches of this world, but your riches of grace, that shall do your souls good. "Not my wealth, nor my blood, but my Christianity makes me noble," quoth that noble martyr Romulus. And though the philosopher merrily, when he was asked whether

were better, wisdom or riches, answered, Riches: "for I have often," said he, "seen poor wise men at rich fools' doors, but never rich fools at poor wise men's doors;" yet wealth may be joined with wisdom, goodness with greatness. Mary and Martha may be sisters; righteousness and riches may dwell together.—*Adams.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 7, 8.

UNWISE LIBERALITY, BUT A WISE REGULATION.

Here is liberality shown not merely by a warmth of feeling, or by a flow of well-expressed sentiments, but by the extent of its bestowals. No one could justly complain that Ahasuerus was of a niggardly turn of mind on this occasion. All was done on a large and generous scale, "according to the state of a king." Costly vessels adorned the festive board, the rich Chalybonian wine foamed and sparkled in the golden tankards. There was no stint at this royal entertainment. The generous man commands our admiration, if not our esteem. And while we seek to show the un wisdom of this king's course of proceeding, we do not refuse our meed of praise for the generous spirit which he displayed.

I. This monarch's liberality was unwise, for it was an encouragement to drunkenness. According to Grecian information, an exceedingly large quantity of wine was drunk at Persian feasts. Now, if the king's provision and the king's decree were intended, or were calculated, to promote extensive drinking, and were a permission to each guest not to stint himself as to the amount of wine he drank, then it was not wise; for moderation is desirable, as all allow. Even strong drinkers admit the advantages of temperance. A certain king asked a philosopher how he was to behave himself, and the philosopher replied, "Remember always that you are a king." This the inebriate cannot do, for alcohol, though it may quicken the imagination, enfeebles both the will, the memory, and the judgment. The drunkard is a slave, and not a king, though he sit on a Persian throne. No drunkard can inherit the kingdom of heaven. The rich wines of earth spoil the taste, so that the spirit cannot appreciate the richer wines of heaven.

II. This monarch's liberality was unwise, even if it were not an encouragement to drunkenness. Alcohol is useless as an article of diet, and wines are drunk for the sake of the alcohol which they contain. Alcohol is treated as an alien in all its travels through the body, and no part welcomes it as a friend, or provides for it a home. If alcohol impairs the power of the physical system, if, further, it blunts the reason, prevents the critical faculty from exercising its fine power of drawing the line between the evil and the good, and lessens the authority of moral control, then surely it should not be received by him who is a self-denying practiser of that which is morally good; then surely the sincere follower of Christ should abstain.

III. This monarch's liberality was unwise, even if it were an encouragement to merriment. The respectable drinker professes to take alcohol, not through the promptings of animalism, but for the sake of the genial excitement and the feeling of good fellowship it promotes. The feast is dull when alcohol does not furnish its exhilarating influence. It excites the intellect, promotes conversation, and gives a charm to existence, its advocates seem to declare. But the laughter engendered by alcohol is as the crackling of thorns under a pot. Yea, it is worse. The thorns crackle and expire without any unpleasant consequences, but this laughter

crackles with a noise that is ominous of coming troubles. An even flow of pleasure, the product of the harmonious and healthy working of all the parts of a man's nature, is more to be preferred than that undue excitement which produces a fearful relapse and a painful recoil.

IV. This monarch's unwise liberality was in some measure atoned for by the wisdom of his regulation. The spirit of the regulation made by this Persian monarch may be brought out by the statement that every man was allowed to please himself. And this, so far, is wise. Let there be no forced drinking at the feast. We may go further, and say, Let the man be a teetotalter without asking unpleasant questions, and letting him feel that his course requires an apology. The social tyranny of the past has received a blow through the advance of temperance principles from which it will not recover; but we still feel too much of its power at our public feasts. Surely a man ought to be allowed to refuse wine in the same way as he would refuse any other article at the table.

Let wise men learn to abstain. Hooker says that "a greater good is to be chosen before a less." Some men declare that it is good to take alcoholic beverages, but it is plainly proved that it is a greater good not to take; therefore let the not-taking be the purpose of every well-instructed nature. If we seek the preservation of bodily health we must not take. If reason is to rule, if the balance of the moral nature is to be preserved, if body, soul, and spirit are to be presented an acceptable and holy and living sacrifice to God by Christ Jesus, we must beware of alcoholic drinks; we must exercise wise and joyful restraints at all festive gatherings; we must recognize the truth that we are greater, and bow to greater things than that of allowing the soul to be slave of the body, the moral nature to be moulded by fashion, and the reason to be tyrannized over by foolish customs.

I. The drunkard's excuses, by which he endeavours to defend or palliate his crime. 1. Good fellowship. But can friendship be founded on vice; especially on a vice which notoriously impairs the memory and the sense of obligation, leads to the betrayal of secrets, and stirs up strife and contention? Instead of promoting conversation, it destroys it by destroying the very capacity of communicating rational and agreeable thought. The drunkard may make his company merry, but they laugh at, not with him, and merely because they are delighted with the sight of one sillier than themselves. 2. It drowns care. But the drunkard's care must arise either from the ill state of his health, the unfortunate position of his worldly affairs, or the stings of his guilty conscience; and, in either case, his temporary oblivion is purchased at the cost of an aggravation of the evils which cause him to desire it. To drink to drown remorse is especially absurd, for all that the drunkard can expect from this course is the benefit of travelling some part of the road to eternal misery with his eyes covered. 3. The drunkard has other excuses. He says that he is so exposed to care and business that he cannot avoid drinking to excess, or that he is of so easy and flexible a temper that he cannot resist the importunities of his friends, as he calls them. Thus he is for softening his vice into a sort of virtue, and calling that good nature which his creditor calls villany, and his family cruelty.

II. The drunkard's woe. This is made up of the miserable effects, as well temporal as spiritual, of his favourite vice. 1. Poverty. 2. Contempt. 3. Ill health. 4. An untimely death. Consider, too, the spiritual evils that spring from and punish the vice of drunkenness. 1. The understanding is depraved and darkened. 2. The will is enfeebled and dethroned. The passions are inflamed and rendered ungovernable. 3. Regard for men, reverence for God, are destroyed. Drunkenness travels with a whole train of other vices, and requires the whole width of the broad way to give it room.—*Clapham's Selected Sermons.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7, 8.

Here was no compulsion, either as to the measure or the quality of the draught: every man's rule was his own choice. Who can but blush to see forced healths in Christian banquets, when the civility of many pagans commands liberty!—*Bishop Hall*.

The bounties of Providence are continual evidence of God's tender care towards us, his underserving creatures, and are to be thankfully and humbly received, and used piously and in moderation. They are given for the support of our nature, to enable us to glorify God in our bodies and our spirits; let us not then render ourselves incapable of doing so by drowning our rational powers in intoxicating liquors, and throwing our bodies out of health and comfort by a worse than beastly use of God's mercies.—*Hughes*.

Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart to the Lord.—*Paul, the Apostle*.

There was no forcing of healths or urging of them; every man drank as he pleased; so that if there were any that drank to excess, it was their own fault. This caution of a heathen prince, even then when he would show his generosity, may shame many that are called Christians, that think they do not sufficiently show their good house-keeping nor bid their friends welcome unless they make them drunk, and, under pretence of sending the health round, send the sin round and death with it. There is a woe to them that do so; let them read it and tremble (Hab. ii. 15, 16). It is robbing men of their reason, their richest jewel, and making them fools, the greatest wrong that can be.—*Matthew Henry*.

"The man who would compel his fellows to wound their own souls, by sinning against God, must be viewed in no better light than a barbarian who puts a sword into their hands, and requires them to sheathe it in their own bowels."

We are not told in the present passage that the king on this occasion exceptionally permitted moderation, especially to such of his guests as were, according to their ancestral customs, addicted to moderation, and who would else have been compelled to drink moderately; for the words with which this verse concludes, while they imply also a permission to each to drink as little as he chooses, are specially intended to allow every one to take much.—*Berthan*.

Ver. 8. I. This *shows the common sense of the king*. He behaved much better in this matter than many who are known as gentlemen. Many are lost through being importuned to drink against their wish.

II. This *would test the moral strength of the guests*. Wise men will not eat and drink more than the laws of temperance allow. If any drank too much, it was his own fault; there was no compulsion. He could blame neither the king nor the law.

III. The *tenth verse shows, however, that wine mastered the king*. He would suffer no man to be compelled to drink to excess, yet set the example of excessive drinking. The law provided for moderation, but the king went beyond all that. In eating, drinking, and everything we do, let us remember the chief end of man.—*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

Drunkenness. Drunkenness is an abomination to God and a degradation to man. By this sin the creature which is inferior only to the angels makes himself lower than the brute.

I. *See the peril of moderate drinking*. It creates the appetite for drink. We have no natural taste for it; it increases as well as creates the appetite. Supply creates demand; it grows with what it feeds on. It gives the appetite entire control. The man becomes first a slave, then a victim.

II. *See the madness of drunkenness*. It beclouds the intellect, destroys the personality, and debases the image of God.

III. *See the woes of drunkenness*. There is the woe of physical conse-

quences; there is the woe of a distracted mind; there is the woe of perverted powers; there is the woe of moral defects; and there is the woe of God's malediction. This is written in both volumes of the Scripture.—*Rev. C. Leach, P.G.S.*

There is no homogeneity between alcohol and any part of man's physical system. Tissue does not assimilate it; the blood cells are distorted in shape and imperfect in action through its pernicious influence; the nervous system is deranged, and the nerve centres are quickened to undue action, by its irritating power; the digestive processes are arrested by its precipitating properties; the *liquor sanguinis* flows with greater ease and purity when not impregnated with its subtle poison; animal heat is promoted by oleaginous substances, but ultimately lowered by the injurious action of alcohol; and the cerebrum can decide difficult questions with greater clearness, and the cerebellum can hold the reins of government with more perfect mastery, when alcohol does not disturb. Alcoholic drinks are injurious, for they impair the body's power of resisting both the approaches of pestilence and the changes of climate. Life in God's world must be preserved on God's conditions of truth, sobriety, and industry. The man who takes alcoholic drinks in moderation may suppose that he will escape damage, but it is a delusion, for the man who drinks his daily drams will not only gradually but surely impair the physical nature, but have a blunted conscience, and a solution of continuity in the powers of ratiocination and memory. We cannot be unacquainted with their properties of producing a pharisaic self-compacency in certain classes.

According to the state of the King. For whom it was not unlawful to feast, so to show his liberality towards his peers and courtesy to his people. But that which was blameworthy in him was—1. His vain-glory. 2. His prodigality. 3. His mispending of time, 4. His neglect of business. 5. His contempt of the true God, not once acknowledged by him or his guests. Lastly, their profane mirth and jollity,

without the least note of sanctity or respect to God's glory.—*Trapp.*

In abundance, according to the state of the king, according to the hand = power of the king, means that the great quantity did honour to the power of the king, or that it corresponded to the ability and riches of the king.—*Lange.*

The kingly character. The true king is the able man. Able he should be not only from the abundance of his material resources, and the advantages of his situation, but from the greatness of his moral nature. Every man who is morally able is a king. But this true kingship is only possible by virtue of spiritual alliance with the King Christ Jesus. He was the gloriously able Man. He has such a store of ability that he can make all his followers able.

I. It was not according to the state of a king (1) *to make a vain parade.* The man conscious of his strength or of his wisdom need never and will never boast his powers. There will be fit occasion when he speaks of his ability. The sun shines without directing attention to his rays. (2) *To place temptation in the way of his subjects.* Heaven's King tempteth no man to evil; he seeketh to make all kingly. There is a royal benevolence in his nature and royal beneficence in his proceedings. The kingly are those who imitate this blessed pattern. This unkingly earth needs more kingly men of this true type. (3) *To be weak and capricious.* Poor Ahasuerus was not an able man. He was like a poor reed tossed by the gusts of passion and the whirlwinds of caprice. He sat on a throne, but did not wield the sceptre of a firm will. He was himself governed.

II. It was according to the state of a king (1) *to be munificent.* The hand of some kings is grasping. But the true conception of the kingly hand is to be open in order to spread blessings. The more munificent and the more kingly. Let there be large and unostentatious bestowals of material, intellectual, and moral wealth, and thus we shall be kingly. (2) *To work for moral elevation.* Oh that kings would work for the moral as well as the material progress of the nations! Some do neither.

They pauperize the nations in order to enrich themselves, and see not that the wealth of the people is the wealth of the people's sovereign. The kings are few. We want an increase of moral kings who shall be king-creators. We need a larger royal race to throw broad-cast royal seed from which shall spring a goodly harvest of kingly men. (3) *To embody and manifest moral strength.* That king will not do much in the way of moral elevation who is himself an example of immoral degradation. In order to lift others we must ourselves be lifted. In order to make others able we must ourselves be able. Strength imparted is strength increased. The greater number of kings we create and the more kingly we become. The more we enthroned others and the more splendid does our throne appear.

The common people are like tempered wax, whereon the vicious seal of greatness makes easy impression. It was a custom for young gentlemen in Athens to play on recorders; at length Alcibiades, seeing his blown cheeks in a glass, threw away his pipe, and they all followed him. Our gallants, instead of recorders, embrace scorching lust, starting pride, staggering drunkenness, till their souls are more blown than those Athenians' cheeks. I would some Alcibiades would begin to throw away these vanities, and all the rest would follow him. Thus spreads example, like a stone thrown into a pond, that makes circle to beget circle, till it spread to the banks. Judas's train soon took fire in the unsuspecting disciples; and Satan's infections shoot through some great star the influence of damnation into the ear of the commonalty. Let the experience hereof make us fearful of examples.—*Adams.*

The drinking was according to the law; none did compel. The king had expressly appointed "that they should do according to every man's pleasure." Of course there is the question whether, if some man's "pleasure" should take him beyond the bounds of temperance and propriety, any restraint would be put upon him? It seems as if there would be. The enforcement of that part

of the rule, if it existed, was probably left with the "officers of the house." The dangerous time was at the end of a feast, as we shall see. Meantime, it is enough to observe that there is to be no compulsion; the inebriating cup is not to be pressed on the unwilling guest. That custom apparently had been but too common among the Persians and their imitators. It is not entirely, however, in moral recoil that sanction is thus given in law to the better practice. There is a touch of political prudence in it. For here at the feast are princes from all parts, with their retainers and tribes. There are men here from the mountains who are famous for their temperance and for the strictness and simplicity of their manners. Such men would not be won, but disgusted rather and alienated from the royal cause, by anything like Bacchanalian excess. In prudence, therefore, as well as from, possibly, higher motive, the principle of temperance must have the reinforcement of public law.

It is humiliating to remember that no long time has elapsed in this country since the very same objectionable and repulsive habit against which this public law of the Persians was directed, prevailed in some of the social circles of this country. It was a point of hospitality to press the bottle even on the unwilling guest. The generous host hardly felt that he had done his duty until his guests were reeling, and if some of them were under the table the triumph of his beneficence was complete. You might easily cull from the poets of the last century, both of England and Scotland, descriptions and allusions pointing to a state of things which, happily, has now passed away. This, indeed, is our reason for dwelling on such a subject—repulsive enough in itself—for even a few moments. It is always helpful to observe any signs of a real progress, and, undoubtedly, in the course of a generation or two, we have in this particular made very great progress. Within the whole sphere of what is called society, anything approaching compulsion would not be tolerated, and in fact is never attempted.

Whether we do not, on a wider scale, as a people in fact, and with the force of law, practise compulsion still, and that on the weakest and most helpless part of our people, is a very serious question, and one which, to say the least, we cannot answer with the same confidence. If places where drink is sold to the common people are multiplied much beyond the reasonable needs of the community; if exceptional privileges are given to the sellers; if their houses, with many exits and entrances, are planted in the most conspicuous spots; if they burn the brightest lights in the streets, and are allowed to keep open long after other trades and industries are closed and silent, does not all this and more of the same kind amount to a sort of compulsion to working-people, and trades-people, and thoughtless young people of both sexes? If *the spirit* of that old Persian law were expressed in our own legislation about drink, it would, as we cannot help feeling, be all the better for the morals and manners of our time, for the sobriety of the working-classes, and for the safety of the young. "Men are not made virtuous by Act of Parliament" has grown to be a kind of axiom on this and some other subjects; and many a one rides off on it, easily and gaily, as though he had performed some feat in logic. But the axiom is one which ought to be disputed. It is not broadly and roundly true. Indeed a part of it is untrue; for Acts of Parliament, when they are wise and suitable to the people for whom they are framed, do help, instrumentally, to make men virtuous. So Acts of Parliament, when they are unwise and evil, help, instrumentally, to make men vicious. When temptations and inducements to excess are made too strong for the feeble resistance they meet with, and made so partly by legislation, is it not clear that the State herself becomes a temptress, and to that extent does "compel"? She makes the law under which—in whatever way the responsibility may be shared—there are so many victims. She gathers the tax which intemperance pays to sustain her

magnificence and power. She must therefore have some corresponding ability to promote goodness and morality in their exterior forms. She can refuse to tempt, or to sanction temptation. She can keep the path of virtue and obedience, as far as it is in her care, open. In one word, as we have it on the highest authority, she can be "the minister of God" to men "for good."

So much we have thought it right to say in contravention of the dictum of the let-alone philosophy which is so much applied to this and some kindred subjects. But we cordially assent to the view that virtue and goodness in the deeper sense are first of all from above—from the Father of lights, from the untempted, untempting God, all-generous, ever-merciful—and then that in earthly form they are the result and product of the free action and mutual intercourse of human minds. Let the moral and intellectual power of the community, in its full force, come to the rescue. Direct conflict with evil can only take us a certain length even if it be successful. The inculcation and the production of goodness among our fellow-men will take us at once into illimitable fields, and set us on a pathway of progress unending. When we have large increase of knowledge among the people, some corresponding elevation of social sentiment, and some refinement of taste, and some improvement in the structure of houses, and amusements which are not corrupting and yet are really amusing—we may hope confidently to see the same process taking place among the masses of the people, in relation to temperance, which has been accomplished so largely among the higher classes. It is a vast and various problem. It is a long question. We can only do our own part by adopting sound principles, and, still more, by the uniform practice of moderation in all things, because we are of those who believe that "the Lord is at hand." Whether we eat, therefore, or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do all to his glory.—*Ruleigh*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 9.

VASHTI, THE PERSIAN MONARCH'S QUEEN.

I. Her significant name. Those critics who determine the personality of Ahasuerus do not speak so positively about the personality of Vashti. We read her name, but cannot tell either her ancestors or the place of her birth. It may be supposed that she came from Yezd, for the women of this province were esteemed the most beautiful in Persia. The proverb is, that to live happy a man must have a wife of Yezd, eat the bread of Yezdecas, and drink the wine of Shiraz. However, she stands before us in a great measure unknown. She plays her part in the drama, and then disappears from the stage, but does not pass away without imparting useful lessons. Her very name is significant, and means in old Persian "the best." She was good of countenance, and doubtless possessed "the light of that dark eye" which made the power of Eastern women, "wondrous strong, yet lovely in their strength." There was a charming grace in her motion, and a pleasant witchery in her voice. Her "long locks foiled the painter's power." She was so lovely, that after the assembled magnates had been satiated with beautiful sights, she must be brought forth to minister to the pleasure of natures cloyed with the very excess of beauty and the brilliance of regal splendours. The wise man says that "favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." Physical beauty is the gift of God, and by no means to be despised; but that beauty is vain which is the only means employed to procure favour, and which conceals internal unloveliness. But surely there may be the combination of physical beauty and moral loveliness. If we cannot find in nature either the flower well shaped and beautifully tinted that gives forth sweet fragrance, or the bird of beautiful plumage that can send out rich music, yet surely the beautiful woman may by Divine grace give forth the sweet fragrance of godliness, and her deeds become so many glad songs in this weeping world. And much may be done for religion by strong-minded and spiritually-gifted Vashtis. Even many professing Christian women may learn useful moral lessons from one whose religious tenets they might reject. Whatever view may be taken of her conduct, this is plain, that she was not a mere plaything for man, that she was not ready to sacrifice the moral sense in order to feed her own vanity by ministering to the bacchanalian caprice of a despot. Many names are given at random, and do not set forth the attributes of the persons to whom they are applied. A woman may be called Vashti, and yet not be the best either physically, or intellectually, or morally. Certain it is that many bear the better name of Christian who are not Christlike. The outward beauty is not increased by the outshining of inward loveliness; the "marred" countenance is not rendered attractive by the pervasive and far-gleaming influence of a soul "full of grace and truth." The Christian should be the best, if not in physical beauty, if not in intellectual grace and power, yet in that spiritual loveliness which can make all attractive. Better than the name that proclaims either physical beauty or glorious ancestry, better than the boasted titles of earth, is that name which tells of Divine grace in the soul, which links us on to the sublime ancestry of God's true heroes, and betokens our Divine royalty.

II. Vashti the queen also gives a feast. It is asserted that Vashti was one of the king's inferior wives, dignified with the title of queen. And this statement is supported by a reference to Herodotus. Now in the book to which the reference is here made we find that the great historian relates that the Persians made this statement to King Amyntas—that it is a custom with us Persians, when we have given a great feast, to introduce our concubines and lawful wives to sit by our side. But the statement was evidently made for an illegitimate and licentious

purpose, and is not, therefore, to be received as a correct representation of Persian customs. And if it were, the appeal proves too much, for it shows that Vashti was neither a lawful wife nor a concubine, for both are said to be introduced to the feasts. The separation of men and women is in accordance with existing Oriental customs, which oblige women to feast separately from the men, even on the same occasions of rejoicing. And this was plainly the custom in the time of Ahasuerus. Certainly it was a special favour shown unto Esther when the king and Haman attended the banquet she had prepared. If Vashti were a mere concubine she would not have been sent for with such courteous formality, and she would not have ventured to refuse to comply with the despot's command. The feast is said to be in the palace, as if to mark the separation more distinctly. And she gave the feast to the ladies either in her own apartments, or in some portion of the royal dwelling placed at her disposal. According to this custom men must feast together, and women must be excluded. But the Divine word teaches the better rule, that men should never so conduct themselves as to make it expedient to exclude the society of virtuous women. For the woman is the complement of the man. Each from each, each to each, should both receive and give. Perfect manhood cannot be attained except there be the refining touch of a woman's gentle hand. And perfect womanhood cannot be reached unless a man's influence is at work imparting strength. But this above all—no man should go where a virtuous and high-souled woman cannot enter. Christianity has still a great work to do in teaching men that all pleasures should be forbidden in which wives and children cannot participate. The feasting is injurious where pure and sensitive spirits are not regarded as welcome guests.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 9.

It is remarkable in this third feast—
I. *That the women feasted within doors.* Not in the open court, as their husbands did.

II. *That they feasted apart from the men.* Which, whether it were of pride, because Vashti would keep state by herself, or of necessity, because either the custom of the country or the king's jealousy would not allow her presence among so many of the opposite sex, yet surely this may condemn our most lascivious mingling of both sexes together in dancing and such like meetings, where nothing is more usual than lustful looks. Lot, feasting and drinking wine with his own daughters fell into sin. The Israelites doing the like with the daughters of Moab were ensnared and subverted. The dancing damsel so inflamed that old goat Herod, that, like a madman, he sweareth to give her her desire to the half of his kingdom.—*Trapp.*

I cannot but envy the modesty of heathen dames. Vashti the queen and her ladies, with all the several ranks of the sex, feast apart, entertaining each other with a bashful courtesy, without

wantonness, without that wild scurrility which useth to haunt promiscuous meetings. Oh shameful unchastity of those loose Christians, who must feed their lust while they fill their bellies, and think the feast imperfect where they may not satiate their eye no less than their palate.—*Bishop Hall.*

While the king showed the honour of his majesty, the queen and her ladies showed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.—*M. Henry.*

The king did not grudge to his queen and the women of Shushan the pleasures which he allowed himself and his male subjects, so far as they could be enjoyed without indecency.

It would have been dangerous to morals and inconsistent with received usages for the queen and ladies of Shushan to have associated with the other sex in their banquet; but they had a feast by themselves, in which, doubtless, they respected the laws of decorum and temperance.

Let not women be locked in their chambers as if they were criminals that

must be locked under close restraint; but let them not use their liberty for an occasion to the gratification of idleness, or a spirit of dissipation. Let them beware of that society that would corrupt their morals or stain their character.—*Rev. George Lounson.*

The name Vashti has probably a connection with the old Persian *vahisti* (the best), or with the related *behisht*. In modern Persian Vashti signifies a *beautiful woman*. Vashti gave the feast to the ladies in the king's palace, *i. e.* either in her own apartments, which also were in the royal residence, or in some other dwellings there which were placed at her disposal for this festive occasion.—*Lange.*

The condition of woman in antiquity was little better than that of a slave. She was the property of her husband, if married; if unmarried, she was the plaything or slave of man, never his equal. The morality of married life, which is the strength and glory of any people, was hardly known. Pompey and Germanicus were singular in the fidelity that marked their marriage relations on both sides, and were famous through the singularity. The utter im-

purity of the men reacted in a similar self-degradation of the other sex. In Rome marriages became, as a rule, mere temporary connections. In order to escape the punishments inflicted on adultery in the time of Tiberius, married women, including even women of illustrious families, enrolled themselves on the official lists as public prostitutes. St. Paul only spoke the language which every one who knows the state of morals of those days must use, when he wrote the well-known verses in the opening of his Epistle to the Romans. The barbarians of the German forests, alone of the heathen world, retained a worthy sense of the true dignity of woman. "No one there laughs at vice," says Tacitus, "nor is to seduce and to be seduced called the fashion." "Happy indeed," continues the Roman, thinking of the state of things around him, "those states in which only virgins marry, and where the vows and heart of the bride go together. Infidelity is very rare among them." The traditions of a purer time still lingered beyond the Alps; the after-glow of light that had set elsewhere.—*Geikie.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 10 and 14.

A CATALOGUE OF NAMES.

Names are applied to persons and things to set forth their distinguishing characteristics, and to separate one from the other. The name of the person should represent and bring before us the person so designated. But the names of these seven eunuchs and seven princes do not give us any indication of their peculiar properties. These names are names only. The persons named are lost in the oblivion of the past.

I. Human names are needful to the perfection of the historic record. This Book of Esther is a history as well as a drama. For the consistency of the drama, and to the perfection of the historic record, there must be the record of names. We may wish to know something about the persons named, but the historian cannot always check his narration to describe every person to whom allusion must be made. All he has to do is to give a faithful and general account of the transactions recorded.

II. Human names are useful as being incidental testimonies to the veracity of the history. A long list of names is dry reading. It sometimes makes an unpleasant break in the even flow of the narrative, but it gives an air of truthfulness to the record. It shows that the writer either has much skill, or is speaking about real transactions with which he is familiar. We have no just reason to suppose that these sacred writers were endowed with the worldly cunning which led

them to conjure and insert names for the purpose of making their myths appear something more than mythical compositions. There is the evident absence of all deep art in their compositions. There is a simplicity which speaks of veracity.

III. Human names are recognized by the Divine mind. Language itself must be of Divine origin. We cannot conceive human language having come into existence in any other way. Names, then, are part of the Divine plan. The God of order must approve of those names which are needful to the orderly movements of society. They are plentifully employed in the Divine book. There are distinctions on earth, and names are needful to preserve those distinctions. There are distinctions in heaven, and perhaps names will continue in that sublimer sphere.

IV. Human names may be entered on the historic page and the owners sink away into obscurity. These seven eunuchs and seven princes have for us no deep interest; their glory is gone, their names only abide. How touching it is to reflect that the greater part by far of the race become only meaningless names! We have even no certain data for the interpretation of these names. They have generally but little resemblance to known Persian names. But we may go further. The best known names of the present will be crowded out of prominence by the names of coming celebrities. There are vast multitudes in this country who do not know the names, and still fewer who are acquainted with the characters, of those great men who have fashioned our country's history. So passes speedily away all human glory. The name of Christian will ever abide.

V. Human names may be entered on the historic page without any merit on the part of the owners. If historic scrolls contained only the names of the meritorious, if even of the meritorious from a human standpoint, how short would be the list! The work of the historian would be very considerably abridged. These names are inserted on account of their connection with the sacred story.

VI. Human names may be recorded in a sacred list and yet the owners not themselves be sacred. This number seven was peculiarly sacred to the Persians. If these eunuchs and princes had been of sacred character, if they had been known for deeds of goodness, we may reasonably suppose that the Divine penman would have paused in order to testify of their noble characters. This course is from time to time pursued in the Bible. Many that are unsacred have their names written on the sacred lists of earth. It is difficult, yea impossible, to keep our sacred lists perfect. The names of the unworthy and the impure will get inserted. The sacred list of heaven alone is perfect. Characters, not reputations, are considered in Divine judgments. Not the skilful utterers, but the consistent doers of Divine words will be written on Divine lists.

VII. Better than the celebrity of human names is the immortality of noble deeds. The most celebrated of human names will vanish. Noble deeds alone are immortal. When the names now blazoned forth on the pages of history, or trumpeted in the ears of the world, are known no more, then will be remembered the names of God's faithful ones. For God is not unrighteous to forget their works and their labours of love.

"Be good, my child, and let who will be clever—
Do noble deeds, not dream them all day long;
And so make life, death, and that vast forever
One grand, deep song."—*Charles Kingsley*.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 13, 14.

It is to be added, also, that mere genealogies, bare narratives of the number of years which persons, called by such and such names, lived, do not carry the air of fiction; perhaps do carry

some presumption of veracity; and all unadorned narratives, which have nothing to surprise, may be thought to carry somewhat of the like presumption too.—*Batler's Analogy*.

Every human name more or less historic. Some persons exercise a direct *historic* influence; others are but *incidentally* associated with the great facts of time.—*Dr. Parker.*

In a similar way, many of the driest portions of the historic books—the genealogies, for example—minister to the same end. The mere frequency and copiousness of such matter, untinged with the smallest trace of mythological influences, and attended, as it often is, with a break in the continuity and interest in the narrative, is, *pro tanto*, a voucher that the writings in which they occur are neither fiction nor myth. . . . We can understand the moderate use which Homer or De Foe may have made of such matter; that is, just so far as to impart a general air of verisimilitude.

But whole pages together of nothing but names are so preposterously beyond all imaginable necessities of allusion, and so destructive of all interest in the reader, that we may safely infer that the introduction of such matter, to the extent we find it in the Bible, will admit of no such solution. As little will it admit of a mythical origin; for though myths may be a gradual and insensible growth of the popular imagination, they are yet true to the principles on which they have been constructed and embellished, to amuse or instruct; and neither the one purpose nor the other can be answered by whole chapters containing nothing but long catalogues of names.—*The Superhuman Origin of the Bible*, by Henry Rogers.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 10—12.

FALSE MERRIMENT AND ITS RESULT.

“When the heart of the king was merry with wine” he sent the seven eunuchs—which refers in the present case to the seven Amshasponds, in others the number refers to the days of the week, or the seven planets—to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s commandment; therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.”

I. Here is false merriment. There is a merriment which is wholesome, and there is a merriment which is injurious. That merriment which is the outcome of a nature working harmoniously will do good, and will leave pleasant reflections; but that merriment which is the outcome of a nature where alcohol has sunk into temporary oblivion all unpleasant views, and has unduly excited into delirious joy, will work damage, and when it has gone a bitter memory will remain. The last state of the man’s heart made merry with wine is always worse than the state before the heart was reached by the delusive liquor. The false, both in nature and in morals, cannot be without either attendant or consequent evils. Better no merriment than that which is purchased at the expense of future repose. Let the heart of man be merry with the new wine of heaven.

II. Here false merriment leads to a foolish command. When the heart is thus merry with wine the head gets wrong. The directing portion of the brain is disordered and weakened by alcohol. Strange freaks are performed, and the merry heart too often becomes a broken heart. Very suggestive is the statement “when the heart of the king was merry with wine.” Nothing is said about the head. The stomach is too often the strongest force in a drunkard’s frame. Ahasuerus, in his maudlin state, did not dream that his beloved and beautiful queen would dare to be disobedient. He gave a foolish command. His folly brought its bitter fruit. He sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind. Let us be careful how and whom we command.

III. A foolish command leads to a humiliating refusal. It never occurred to this proud and merry-making monarch that a woman would venture to refuse, when

courtiers fawned and flattered, and when princes rendered obeisance. In the very climax of his glory and his merriment he received a blow which was more humiliating than defeat on the battle-field. What a consternation when Vashti refused to come! If there was one thing more than another calculated to make this king sober, it was the tidings that Vashti refused to come. Our troubles come from quarters where we least expect them.

IV. This humiliating refusal leads to a still more humiliating display. Sometimes fools are so silly as not to see that they have been humiliated. But Ahasuerus had not been rendered senseless by the copious draughts of rich wine; he had just enough sense left to see that he had received a great affront; "therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him." A king in a childish passion. How unkingly! This royal child asked for his queen to be brought, as an over-spoilt child asks for a fresh toy to gratify a surfeited nature, and then begins to cry and make a farcical scene because the request is refused. If there was one manly spirit present at the scene, he must have blushed for his country to see it governed by such a pitiful specimen of manhood. Here learn—1. *That human greatness reveals human weakness.* Earthly kings are not omnipotent. Only God is all-powerful; and oftentimes with the small hand of his weakest creatures he touches the strong man and makes him tremble. In the day of proudest successes we receive the most humiliating strokes. 2. *An uncurbed will must meet with strange rebuffs.* A Persian monarch's command was not to be disputed, and thus he did not learn to respect the rights of others. While we uphold our own rights, and maintain a proper dignity, we must remember that others have rights. Spoiled children must come to grief. 3. *That at Divine feasts alone do we find the best at the last.* Where Ahasuerus and his like preside the best wine is drunk first, and at the conclusion the guests are only too glad to escape without personal harm. Where Christ presides the joyful guests exclaim, Thou hast kept the good wine till now.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 10—12.

1. It was certainly the king's weakness to send for the queen into his presence when drunk. (1) He dishonoured himself as a husband. He ought to have protected, and not exposed, his wife. (2) He diminished himself as a king in commanding that from his wife which she might refuse, much to the honour of her virtue. 2. Perhaps it was not her wisdom to deny him. (1) She refused, though he sent his command by seven honourable messengers. (2) Had she come, while she did it in pure obedience, it had been no reflection upon her modesty.—*M. Henry.*

1. Great pleasure is often followed by equally great displeasure. 2. Occasions of joyous feasting commonly end in sorrow. 3. Although beauty is a gift of God, still one should not make a boast of it, nor yet be proud of it. 4. Pride occasions much sorrow, and often plunges into destruction.

Ver. 12. *Therefore was the king very*

wroth, and his anger burned in him.

ANGER. I. THE DEFORMITY OF ANGER. What an ugly thing is anger, dispossessing a man of his soul (which is possessed by patience), and disfiguring his body with fieriness of eyes, furiousness of the looks, distortion of the face, inflammation of the nostrils. The Hebrews call anger *Aph*, because therein the nose riseth, the colour changeth, the tongue stammereth, the teeth gnash, the hands clasp, the feet stamp, the pulse beats, the heart pants, the whole man swells like a toad, glows like a devil, tormenting himself before his time; whence many heathens have advised the angry man to look at his face in a glass, and so grow ashamed of his distemper.

II. THE DISGRACE OF ANGER. The Holy Ghost hath stigmatized the angry person for a fool in grain, such an one as exalts folly, sets it upon high to be seen of all, and proclaims himself a fool; yea, the worst of fools; for "proud,

haughty scorner is his name that deal-eth in proud wrath;" that is his title. Thus God loads such a man with disgrace. And whereas he thinks by his big looks and high terms to carry it among men (as Lamech did), when he hath gotten revenge especially; the Apostle purposely disgraceth revenge of injury by a word signifying disgrace, loss of victory, or impotency of mind. And, indeed, it is unmanliness of spirit, and little wit in the head, that causeth a great deal of passion in the heart, as we see in infants and sick people. Thunder, hail, tempest, neither trouble nor hurt the celestial bodies; no more doth anger great minds. The tops of some mountains are said to be so high above the middle region of air, that not so much as the dust of them is moved out of the place from year's end to year's end: so is it here. Great spirits and men of understanding are, like the upper region, in a perpetual serenity; or, at least, like the highest planets, that of all the rest are thought to be lowest in course, or like a diamond that is neither bruised nor cut.

III. THE DANGER OF ANGER. It consumes the body; it confounds the soul. Fevers, colics, palsies, pleurisies, apoplexies, inflammation, consumption, are caused by it, while it dries up the radical moisture (that balsam of the body), boils the heart into brine, and, viper-like, makes an end of the owner; who, as he lived undesired, so he dies unlamented, as Nerva, Valentinian, and other choleric kings and persons of great note, who hereby have wrought their own ruin and ruin. And for the poor soul it is indisposed, by unadvised anger, for prayer or any other duty to God or man. He is laid open, like an un-walled city, to many sins, mischiefs, and miseries; temporal, spiritual, and eternal. He that lives and dies in this fury becomes a prey to the furies of hell.—*Trapp*.

Vers. 10, 12.—What has thus degraded the king? Wine. The king was happy in the obedience of princes, but unhappy in the disobedience of his wife. What a disappointment! He showed the glory of his kingdom, and the honour of his

excellent majesty many days; but he also showed that, with all his glory, he could not command a woman. Disputes between husbands and wives are bad at any time, but much worse in the presence of company. Though a mighty king, he was also a poor slave. He drank wine to excess. He issued an unrighteous command. He was carried away by anger. Rich man! Yet how poor, with all thy wealth. A sober slave is more respected, and more to be respected, than a drunken king. "I will not come," said Vashti; and all the persuasion of the great men could not persuade her. When asked to violate our conscience, let us dare to say, No. If husbands expect obedience from their wives, let them be reasonable in their commands. The guilt of disobedience sometimes rests upon him who issues the command. "Husbands, provoke not your wives to anger." They have given themselves to and for you. Wives, do not dishonour those husbands who have chosen you before all others. Perhaps Vashti thought, What means this uncouth motion? More than six months hath this feast continued, and all this while we have enjoyed the wanton liberty of our sex. Were the king himself this command could not be sent. It is the wine, and not he, that is guilty of this errand: is it for me to humour him in so vain a desire? Will it agree with our modest reservedness to offer ourselves to be gazed at by millions of eyes? Who knows what wanton attempt may follow upon this ungoverned excess? This very message argues that wit and reason hath yielded their place to that besotting liquor. Vashti refuseth to come. . . . "The blood that is once inflamed with wine is apt to boil with rage. It vexes him to think that those nobles whom he meant to send away astonished with the demonstration of his power and majesty should now say, "What boots it Ahasuerus to rule afar off when he cannot command at home? In vain doth he boast to govern kings, while he is checked by a woman."—*Bishop Hall*.

And his anger burned within him; as Nebuchadnezzar's also did upon a like

occasion, hotter than his seven times' heated oven, or than the mountain Etna doth. Moses' anger waxed hot in him, so that he knew not well what he did in it, it raised such a smoke. Jonah was ready to burst with anger; his blood boiled at his heart as brimstone doth at the match. Therefore is the heart set so near the lungs, that when it is heated with anger it may be allayed and cooled by the blast and moisture thereof. Josephus saith that he brake off the feast upon this occasion.—*Trapp*.

We see that God reserves the best for the last. God's last works are his best works. The new heaven and the new earth are the best; the second wine that Christ created himself was the best; spiritual things are better than natural. A Christian's last is his best. God will have it so for the comfort of Christians, that every day they live they may think, my best is behind, my best is to come; that every day they rise they may think, I am nearer heaven one day than I was before, I am nearer death, and therefore nearer Christ. What a solace is this to a gracious heart! A Christian is a happy man in his life, but happier in his death, because then he goes to Christ;

but happiest of all in heaven, for then he is with Christ. How contrary to a carnal man, that lives according to the sway of his own base lusts! He is miserable in his life, most miserable in his death, but most miserable of all after death. I beseech you lay this to heart. Methinks, considering that death is but a way for us to be with Christ, which is *far better*, this should sweeten the thinking of death to us, and we should comfort ourselves daily that we are nearer happiness.—*Sibbes*.

Ahasuerus went from bad to worse, as we all do whenever we fail to practise the self-denial of obedience to God. Pride, luxury, excess in wine, mad upsetting of the first laws of nature, these came first; then followed in its order furious anger, which may do anything. He was stung in the apple of his eye. When I am bringing to so triumphant a finish the pageant planned since I came to the throne, when everybody is thinking how supremely grand I am above all men, to be thus humiliated by a woman! Ah, sire! had you respected yourself you would have been spared all the humiliation.—*Symington*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 10—12.

VASHTI'S DILEMMA.

There are great crises in the history of individuals as well as of nations. An arrestive hand checks our progress. We are compelled to pause and deliberate. Such a crisis had now arrived in the history of Vashti. The great turning-point of her life now appears. The question is, Shall I be unequally, and thus remain a queen? or shall I be queenly, and become unequened? Summon up thy heroism, Vashti; all thy fortitude will now be required.

I. She receives an unkingly message. Doubtless the seven chamberlains would give the king's message in true courtly style; but even courtly words may indicate unkingly intentions. It was so in this case. Vashti was to leave the company of her guests, and put on the crown royal, which was a high-pointed turban; and consequently she was to appear in entire royal apparel. We may suppose that her person was to be graced with costly robes of splendid colours from the province of Cashmir, and with garments made of the finely-wrought and richly-variegated silks of the Medians. Pearls from the Persian Gulf would flash their varied and chastened colours. Rich jewels would not be wanting to increase the splendour. And gold from the distant parts of the empire would manifest the vastness of the king's resources, and tend to set forth the charms of the queen's person. Being purified with oil of myrrh and sweet odours, she would emit a pleasant fragrance by her every motion, as well as display her beauty in new and attractive aspects to the beholders. No purpose was to be served beyond that

of showing the people and the princes her beauty. She was to throw aside her self-respect, to divest herself of true queenly attributes, and appear with her face unveiled, in order that the courtly revellers might feast upon her countenance; and thus she was to do that which was abhorrent to an Eastern woman's sense of propriety. No wonder if her spirit rebelled against such unkingly purposes. The kings of time are cruel to their favourites. At first they may be loaded with honours; but afterwards, if any offence is given, the honours are taken away, and the favourites made to feel that it would have been better for them to have remained in obscurity. A despot's guests are not to be envied, for the arbitrary and unreasonable nature of his commands may turn their laughter into weeping. But in the long run despots are cruel to themselves. "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul; but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." However, let us remember that the King of heaven is no unreasoning despot. His commandments are not grievous, and are for the highest good of those to whom they are given. The guests at Divine feasts need never fear that he will send unkingly messages. And should they disobey there will be given opportunity for confession and time for amendment. This merciful king bears long and compassionately even with hardened offenders. Blessed indeed are those who serve the King of heaven, and sit down at Divine feasts!

II. She displays a queenly spirit. If Vashti were simply a vain woman,—proud of her mere physical beauty,—it may be fairly conjectured that the desire to display her charms would overpower the spirit of self-assertion, which some suppose to be the explanation of her conduct. This was undoubtedly the one opportunity of her life for reaching the climax of earthly glory. It was indeed a great occasion when womanly vanity would induce compliance; but Vashti rose superior to the seductive prospect. Many of our modern Vashtis would have rushed to the banqueting-hall, and the spirit of self-assertion would not have been allowed to overmaster the spirit of vanity. Not only women, but many men have sacrificed far more than Vashti was called upon to sacrifice in order to obtain a portion even of that applause which would have greeted the queenly beauty had she, with winning smiles and graceful movements, presented herself at the king's command. But she refused to go, and nobly braved the worst consequences rather than violate her modesty, and appear in public unveiled. For anything we know to the contrary, she may have tried reasonable methods in order to extricate herself from the difficult position. But who can reason with a despot who has been made unreasonable by wine, and whose smallest caprice must not be thwarted? The narrative simply states the result, that she refused to go at the command of the monarch. However, if Vashti's assailants still persist that she was an arrogant and supercilious beauty,—that she was intoxicated with admiration and with her exalted position,—there is something to admire in that daring spirit which was ready to brave death rather than obey a command which appeared to her unreasonable; for she would know that a Persian monarch's rage might mean death to the offender. Certainly obedience is due to those in authority; but the command of conscience is superior to the commands of husbands, or of kings. The commands of conscience should be supreme; but there is a danger lest the voice of mere caprice be confounded with the voice of conscience. The commands must be prayerfully and carefully examined. The voices must be tried. Have they a Divine sound? Then all must follow the directions of the all-impulsive voice, though it leads to banishment, to spoliation, and even to death.

III. Her queenly spirit was not appreciated. It provoked the wrath of the king, and his anger burned in him. And the courtiers and great ladies did not appear to her defence. There is ever a natural tendency for the strong to oppress the weak. Throughout all ages women have found it difficult to get their due from men. Christianity has been woman's great elevator and benefactor; and she has been, as is most fitting, its most faithful adherent and propagator. But

still woman's weakness is too often trespassed upon by manly strength. To be on the side of right, if supported by might, excites little or no opposition ; but to be on the side of right when it is the side of weakness is to be guilty of folly and of rebellion against constituted authority. Even to this day the inebriated Ahasuerus has his apologists, though they may not mean it ; and the unqueened Vashti is followed in her retirement with the pitying sneer of those who assert that she failed because she was not a sagacious woman. The banished Vashtis ought to receive full credit for the heroism of their conduct. Shameful it is that those who profess to believe in persecuted apostles, in slain reformers, and in a crucified Jesus, should always be carefully looking about for some error in conduct, for some failure in policy, in order to account for the non-success of those whom society has banished from its palaces. Not only ancient, but modern critics would account for the beheading of John by the statement that he made a rude and personal attack ; for the stoning of Stephen, by the suggestion that he spoke truth in an unpalatable form ; for the unpopularity of Paul, that his bodily presence was weak ; and for the banishment of Vashti, by the supposition that she was arrogant and unwise in her method of refusal. The Vashtis must be prepared for some depreciation if they resolutely adhere to, and firmly follow, that which they believe to be true, and noble, and virtuous. But this may be their consolation, that time is on their side, and that the Great Supreme accepts sincerity of motive ; yes, though the consequent action be not the wisest. For he is not a hard task-master. Let the true-hearted Vashtis rejoice, for their judgment is with God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 10—12.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging ; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." Ahasuerus formerly behaved like a king. His wine, and the vessels in which it was drunk, were royal, according to the state of the king ; but now his behaviour is like one of the vain fellows. He boasts of the extraordinary beauty of his wife. In defiance of the manners of the Persians, and of the laws of decency, he will now have her brought into a drunken assembly of princes and peasants for a public show. What is it that has thus degraded the great king ? An honest peasant that knows how to guide his affairs, and to govern his family with discretion, is more truly royal than Ahasuerus, exposing his shame before his people. Wine has transformed him from a king to a clown, or something below a clown. It is said, that the Spartans used to compel their slaves to intoxicate themselves, that they might show them in their cups to their children, and thus produce in their minds a perpetual detestation of this worse than beastly vice. You have no occasion to bring drunken men into the presence of

your children. Scripture gives you pictures of this vice sufficient for your admonition and theirs. It is plain from the instance before us, that a sober slave is more respectable than a drunken king.

She was fair to look upon, and all the princes and people must, for once, be gratified with a sight of her shining countenance, that they might admire the king's happiness in the possession of such unrivalled beauty. Vain man ! Did he not know that the most glorious beauty of the human face as of the visible creation, is but a fading flower ? Still less did he know, that this beauty, in a day's time, would be no longer his property, and that he would lose the possession of it by his own folly. Let those who have wives, however beautiful, be as though they had them not ; for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Vashti had good reason to beg to be excused from appearing in a company where too many were merry with wine. She is too often imitated by women who have promised obedience to their husbands. They will allege, that the mean-

ing of their promise was that they were to obey their husbands in all reasonable things. If by reasonable things they meant things in which they could give obedience with a good conscience, the limitation would be very proper. But a more frequent meaning which they have for the expression is, things which please their own humours. If these only are the matters in which they are disposed to yield obedience, the promise ought never to have been made; for whenever they conform themselves to their own humours, rather than to the known will of their husbands, they break a solemn promise.

If husbands expect due obedience from their wives, let them be always reasonable in their commands. You see, that all the authority of the greatest king in the world could not make Vashti obedient to a foolish command. She will rather encounter the king's wrath; and "the wrath of a king is like messengers of death."

Therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. He was confounded and shocked at the unexpected disappointment. He hoped to show to all his people and princes in Shushan how happy he was, and only showed them his misery.—*Rev. G. Larson.*

Then took place the succession of violent scenes, so thoroughly characteristic of Oriental despotism, but which to the Hebrew historian was so familiarized, that they appear to fill him rather with

admiration than astonishment and horror—the order for the queen to unveil herself—contrary to the immemorial usage of Persia, and therefore the sure sign of the king's omnipotence—before the assembled court, the rage of the king at her refusal, and her instantaneous divorce. In the annual Persian representation of the tragedy of the sons of Ali, an English ambassador is brought as begging their lives; and to mark his nationality a boy dressed up as an unveiled woman accompanies him as the ambassadress.—*Stanley's Jewish Church and Note.*

The queen refused to appear at the king's command as delivered by the eunuchs, because she did not choose to stake her dignity as a queen and a wife before his inebriated guests. The audacity of Persians in such a condition is evident from history.—*Keil.*

While Ahasuerus was intent to show how far the limits of his empire extended, by calling to his court the governors of the most distant provinces, he found in close proximity, yea, in his very house, insubordination to his will. Though he knew how to punish it, yet he could not conquer it, nor turn it into obedience to his wishes. There is, therefore, a power higher than that of man, were he even the mightiest ruler of earth. To disobey human commands may be dangerous, may bring temporal disadvantage, but to despise God's laws is degrading, and will bring eternal ruin.—*Lange.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 13, 14.

THE SEVEN WISE MEN.

"Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" At first sight we may naturally look for it in the palaces of kings, for they have the opportunity of gathering round them the choicest spirits in the realm. They have money at their command; and money answereth all things. The wise man's wisdom is too often a mere article of barter, and is sold to the highest bidder. The prospect of money sometimes causes the wise man to prostitute his wisdom to foolish purposes. But the wisdom of courtiers is not always directed by highest moral motives. The wisdom may be great, but the moral power weak. True wisdom is oftener found in lowly hearts and true. A poor wise man may by his wisdom deliver the city; and yet no man remember that same poor man. Poverty has its drawbacks. Little wisdom counts for much where there is much wealth, sounding titles, and an exalted position.

I. The character of these wise men. In general we may say that they were men of learning and men of business. Observation was joined with meditation to the extension of their knowledge. They were not mere bookworms, but studied men and things. They might judge the times by heavenly phenomena as astrologers; but, like the princes of Issachar, they also may have been "men who knew the times, what Israel ought to do." The perfectly wise man must study men as well as books. It is well to know human law and judgment; it is better to know Divine law. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." This defines the nature of true wisdom. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding."

II. The favour granted to these wise men. Ancient kings preserved their dignity by exclusiveness. Only a few were admitted to familiar intercourse. These wise men saw the king's face. This earth's grandest King frequented the thronged highways. He was the guest of publicans and of sinners. His greatness was not dependent upon the pomp of circumstances. His royalty could stand the rude stare of the multitude. The eye of faith, though possessed by the lowliest, may still see the face of heaven's King. "The pure in heart shall see, and do see, God."

III. The exalted position occupied by these wise men. They sat the first in the kingdom. Many would regard them with envy. But highest seats are not always the most pleasant. Golden chairs may be uneasy; silken couches may have their pricking thorns. A wise man may sit the first in the kingdom to-day, and to-morrow he may be elevated to the gallows on which Haman was hung. Lofty seats are dizzy and dangerous places. Christ's spiritual kingdom affords safe and pleasant seats for all its subjects.

IV. The noble qualities of these wise men were ignobly used. They knew the times, so as to trim their sails to the best advantage for themselves. Their wisdom was a mere marketable commodity. It was ready to be used anyhow for the procuring of either wealth, or place, or power. They knew law and judgment, but they knew that what was law for the despot was not law for the oppressed subject. Prudence is a virtue; but prudence may be degraded into mere time-serving policy. There is a wisdom which dares to do right, and brave all consequences.

V. The vision with which these men were favoured had no transforming power. They saw the king's face, but did not catch the inspiring influence of a mighty soul. There must have been in that wide realm faces better worth seeing than that of the weak-minded despot. We cannot gather from this account that these wise men were any nobler for this favoured vision. The face of heaven's King has transforming power. Its light dispels the darkness of humanity; its Divine influences rain down and change the very faces of beholders. "But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." The likeness is being now and here fashioned. Each Christian's face should bear the impress of royalty. Christians too should emit transforming and purifying influences.

VI. The exalted position occupied by these wise men was not employed for the advantage of the oppressed. Where is the use of being great if we cannot use our greatness to help the little? High seats should be occupied not for self-glorification, but to lift up our fellows out of the pits of wretchedness. We do not read that these men bent from their proud positions to rescue a condemned woman—condemned before she had been heard, and banished without an opportunity of saying a word in justification of her conduct. Surely it is better to err on the side of mercy. Let those in high places consider the weaknesses and the awful temptations of those in low places.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 13, 14.

Whereshould the perfection of wisdom be, if not in the courts of great princes? or what can the treasuries of monarchs purchase more valuably precious than learned and judicious attendance? or what can be so fit for honour as the wisest? These were his oracles in all his doubts; these are now consulted in this difficulty. Neither must their advice be secretly whispered in the king's ear, but publicly delivered in the audience of all the princes. It is a perilous way that these sages are called to go, betwixt a husband and wife, especially of such power and eminency.—*Bishop Hall*.

As he had seven chamberlains to execute his orders, so he had seven counsellors to direct his orders. The greater power a man hath, the greater need he hath for advice, that he may not abuse his power.—*M. Henry*.

Of these Persian privy counsellors it is said—1. That they were wise men. 2. They were skilful in the times, that is, well versed in histories, and well furnished with experiences. 3. That they knew the laws, which they had ready, and at their fingers' ends, as we say. 4. They also knew judgment, that is, equity and moderation, without which utmost right might be utmost wrong, as, indeed, it proved in the case in hand.—*Trapp*.

Which knew the times. The good man can say, like the psalmist, "My times are in thy hand." "The sovereign Arbiter of destiny holds in his own power all the issues of our life; we are not waifs and strays upon the ocean of fate, but are steered by infinite wisdom toward our desired haven. Providence is a soft pillow for anxious heads, an anodyne for care, a grave for despair."

Ver. 14. The kings of Persia did not suffer themselves to be seen by all persons on all occasions. These were a favoured few. But *all* that love the Lord shall see the "King's face" in heaven. That will be a happy sight. The sorrows of life will then be past; death will then be destroyed; heaven and all its joys will be ours for ever.

Which sat the first in the kingdom.

A great privilege which depended upon wealth, and upon the favour of the king. They who sit with Christ in his kingdom will have no title because of earthly position. It will be because of goodness, and the grace and mercy which saves us.—*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

He that would mount cares not what attendance he dances at all hours, upon whose stairs he sits waiting, what enormities he soothes, what deformities he imitates, what base offices he does prostrate himself to, so he may rise. The poor man envies the great for his honour; the great perhaps envies the poor more for his peace, for as he lives obscurely, so securely. He that rightly knows the many public and more secret vexations incident to honour would not, as that king said of his crown, stoop to take it up, though it lay at his feet before him. When the Lord hath set thee up as high as Haman in the court of Ahasuerus, or promoted thee to ride with Joseph in the second chariot of Egypt; were thy stock of cattle exceeding Job's; did thy wardrobe put down Solomon's, and thy cupboard of plate Belshazzar's when the vessels of God's temple were the ornamature; yet all these are but the gifts of Wisdom's left hand, and the possessors may be under the malediction of God.

How many rich merchants have suddenly lost all! how many noblemen sold all! how many wealthy heirs spent all! Few Sundays pass over our heads without collections for shipwrecks, fires, and other casualties; demonstrative proofs that prosperity is inconstant, riches casual. And for honour, we read that Belisarius, an honourable peer of the empire, was forced in his old age to beg from door to door. Frederic, a great emperor, was so low brought that he sued to be made but the sexton of a church.—*Adams*.

"A great English writer has pictured an imaginary character as having a sweet look of goodness, which drew out all that was good in others. There must have been some such Divine attraction to the poor and outcast in the looks and whole person of our Lord." — *Geikie*.

This King's face has not only a sweet look of goodness, but a transforming power of goodness. To see aright this King's face is not only to have our goodness drawn out, but to have the badness

expelled, and fresh goodness imparted. By the process of devoutly and lovingly gazing we are experiencing the process of being changed into the same Divine image.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 15.

A KING IN CONSULTATION.

Most men have not the opportunity of being present when a king holds a consultation. Such an opportunity is now presented. Enter the banqueting-hall. Let silence be kept, for the king is about to speak. But we shall find here only that which is to be avoided, and nothing to imitate.

I. The king ignores the folly of his own conduct. There is not here the slightest hint that his request was unreasonable. The demand made that Vashti should be brought into the court of revellers unveiled is spoken of in solemn phrase as a commandment, as a proceeding the carrying out of which was needful to the welfare of the state. Men by a change of words, by cunning phrases, try to change the nature of their crimes. It is hard to bring ourselves faithfully to task. We readily ignore the folly of our own conduct when we are bitterly smarting under its results.

II. The king tries to shift the blame on to others. In this the king shows himself the son of that first parent who blamed his wife and tried to exculpate himself. Adam blames Eve. Ahasuerus is wroth with Vashti. Ahab calls Elijah Israel's troubler. Herod beheads John the Baptist. A man blames his fellows; a man finds fault with his circumstances; a man quarrels with his organization. But the last person a man blames is himself. When he has come to do this thoroughly, his reformation is more than half completed.

III. The king tries to get away from the whispers of conscience. If guilty men were fully satisfied with their reasonings about the force of circumstances and their defective organizations, they would not show themselves so uneasy. The reasoning, if conclusive, would be condoning and pacifying. Vashti's crime was only small, if crime it was; why, then, should the king make so great a commotion over so small a matter? Why, because the voice of conscience was not altogether stifled, and it spoke so as to fill him with trouble. The king's dignity might be touched by the unhappy queen's refusal; but his conscience was touched much more. Men are always most angry with, and most severe upon, others when their own consciences are troubled. And when a guilty conscience sits upon the seat of judgment, the poor prisoner may not expect mercy; for then the severest decrees will be pronounced. A guilty conscience is a great legalist. It says what shall be done "according to laws;" it searches out for precedents and examples; it is very strict in its requirements; it does not temper justice with mercy; it keeps all mercy for itself, and justice, which thus becomes injustice, for those brought to its bar. This king had no right to sit in judgment, for he himself was the originator of the supposed misdemeanour.

IV. This king makes others partners of his guilt. Humanity hedges about a king, whether divinity does so or not. Men flock around a royal standard. That which is a crime in a subject becomes only a folly in a king. And so Ahasuerus had no difficulty in gathering around him the wise men to consult about the crime of a poor woman, and condemn her to banishment. It would have required the spirit of a martyr to utter any remonstrances in the presence of this mighty despot, and a martyr spirit is not often found in king's palaces. It requires ruder fare for its development than the sumptuous feasts of royal tables; it needs coarser clothing than purple and fine linen. The world's great prophets are not clothed in soft

raiment. They move in the wilderness. And so it is all the more praiseworthy when those wearing soft clothing have spirits strong and bold. Courtyl martyrs are few, but when found are most noble.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 15.

Instead of at once following out what his anger suggests, Ahasuerus submits his case to the law and custom. This in itself is great and beautiful; this is the victory of culture over crudeness and passion. But in the manner in which this is done here it amounts to nothing after all. We seem to feel in advance that nothing good will come of it.—*Lange*.

Because she hath not performed the commandment, &c. This was a fault, no doubt, but not so heinous as was made of it. The faults of his wife a man must either *tollere* or *tolerare*, cover or cure, and go about to kill a fly upon her forehead with a bottle, as they say. But God hath a providential hand in it for the good of his Church.—*Trapp*.

The combined wisdom of all, it seems, was enlisted to consult with the king what course should be taken after so unprecedented an occurrence as Vashti's disobedience of the royal summons. It is scarcely possible for us to imagine the astonishment produced by such a refusal in a country and court where the will of the sovereign was absolute. The assembled grandees were petrified with horror at the daring affront. Alarm for the consequences that might ensue to each of them in his own household next seized on their minds, and the sounds of bacchanalian revelry were hushed into deep and anxious consultation—what punishment to inflict on the refractory queen.—*Port. Commentary*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 16—20.

COURTIERS FORSAKE A FAILING CAUSE.

It is not here asserted that this is a characteristic of courtiers, which may not be observed in other men; for it is a too general custom to push a man or woman down when tokens of falling are visible. But the courtly style is to flatter the powerful, and to speak no helpful words on behalf of the weak. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety, if there be no personal interests at stake; but these courtiers were time-serving counsellors. They knew the danger of opposing the arbitrary commands of a Persian monarch, and therefore they do not try to palliate Vashti's conduct, but condemned her completely.

I. The courtly orator. Memucan was evidently a true courtly orator, and he was put forth as the spokesman of the rest. He plainly knew that it would not be prudent to offer any opposition to the monarch's wild caprice. Memucan by artful insinuation justifies the extravagant whim of this Eastern despot. The orator can do much either for good or for evil. How awful when his great power is directed by selfishness!

II. His cunning flattery. His flattery was insinuating and captivating. He artfully alludes to the extent of the monarch's dominions, to the restless nature of his decree, and to the vastness of his influence. He flatters by declaring that a wrong done to the king is a wrong done to all his subjects. But he flatters most by assuming that the king's command was altogether legitimate, and in no wise to be disputed. "The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not." Thus it shall be reported, so says the courtly orator; but what says the uncourtly and intelligent observer? Even if he blames Vashti he will not condone the fault of Ahasuerus as was done by Memucan. Truly a flattering mouth worketh ruin.

III. His vicious reasoning. Memucan understood how to make the worse appear the better reason; how cunningly to mingle truth with falsehood; how artfully to fan the king's wrath into a consuming flame; and how, by plausible utterances, to show that the gratification of the king's unreasonable desire was for the welfare of every household in the vast empire. A vicious logical process may be carried out through ignorance, but too often it is indicative of the working of a vicious nature. The heart must be right as well as the head if logical rules are not to be violated. The simple heart will come straight to a correct conclusion where the twisted but cultivated nature will falter.

IV. His time-serving policy. Memucan had regard to the welfare of himself and his compeers more than that justice should be done to Vashti. Thus all are prepared for the sharp verdict that Vashti must be unqueened; that she must have no further intercourse with the monarch; and that another, better than she, was to possess her royal estate. But he carefully refrains from adding, And thus she will have no future opportunity of bringing time-serving courtiers to judgment. These courtiers, in order to save themselves, and prevent Vashti from retaliating, strove, by placing her conduct in the worst light, by showing how injurious would be the influence of one in the highest position throughout the whole realm if she were left unpunished, and by the advocacy of stringent measures, to divest her of all power to do them harm in the future.

V. His unfeeling nature. The true orator should be a man of feeling. His sympathies should go out towards the weak and the oppressed. But Memucan was not a true orator. Certainly he was not a son of consolation. He had power, but it was not power directed by goodness. His gift of speech was ready for the use of the highest bidder. His heart was made of stone. He had a position to maintain, and he would maintain it at whatever cost. The better feelings must be stifled; the voice of conscience must be hushed; a weak woman must be trampled out of existence. Ah, poor Vashti found by bitter experience that an arm of flesh is but a broken reed on which to lean in the day of adversity. Vain is the help of man in the time of trouble. Who shall rise up for her against the courtly speakers and evil plotters? It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in courtiers, in nobles, or in princes.

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN MAN.

"Cursed is the man that trusteth in man; that maketh flesh his arm." To make flesh our arm is to confide in human wisdom, power, riches, &c. for protection from evil, or for the attainment of any personal advantage. This practice spreads through all grades of society. The king Ahasuerus was guilty of it. But let us remark that this practice—

I. Is idolatrous in its principles. Whatever a man confides in for protection and happiness is unquestionably his god. Let all *covetous*, *ambitious*, and *licentious* persons consider this,—they all "make flesh their arm," and their hearts depart from the Lord!

II. It is grovelling in its aim. It looks no higher than present good, and things altogether unworthy of an immortal spirit. God, the proper and adequate good of the soul—the noblest object to which it can aspire—is neglected and shunned; the sinner's heart departs from him, to pursue wind, and chaff, and vanity.

III. It is unreasonable in its foundation. It is built upon an extravagant supposition, viz., that the creature can supply the place of the Creator; indeed, it supposes that man can do what God cannot.

IV. It is destructive in its issue. "Cursed is the man that trusteth," &c. The man that trusteth in his fellows shall be like the heath in the desert—worthless, sapless, fruitless; "he shall not see good when good cometh," shall not enjoy

it—"but he shall inhabit the parched places," &c. He shall prosper in nothing. His soul shall be disconsolate, like a man banished to some desolate spot, amidst burning sands and trackless wilds, where all is melancholy, dreary, and waste, and where he at length expires through famine. The cisterns he has hewn out are broken.

Learn—1. There is no safety in man. 2. To put your trust in the Lord.—*Sketches of Sermons*, 1838.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 16—20.

Ver. 16. What is the influence our conduct is likely to have upon others? Will many follow our example? Then if we go wrong, we must share the guilt of those who follow us. Offences must needs come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh. Vashti's offence, it was said, was likely to be hurtful to all the princes and people in all the dominions of Ahasuerus. The great are under strong obligations to act aright. The greater our position, the greater our influence for good or for evil. Those in the humblest walks of life have an influence. It is true all round that "no man liveth unto himself, no man dieth unto himself."

A bold man he was, surely, that durst deliver his mind so freely of such a business, and in such a presence. What if the king and queen should grow friends again—where had Mennean been? If his cause and his conscience had been as good as his courage was great, all had been as it ought to be. . . . Here they condemn the queen unheard and unconvicted, which is against all law, Divine and human. Was the king's bare word a law or rule of right? and is not a wife, in case of sin commanded by her husband, rather to obey God than man? Here you may see when flattery and malice give information, shadows are made substance, and improbabilities necessities, so deceitful is malice, flattery so unreasonable.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 17. It has been said that the nation regulates itself by the example of the king. It is to be feared there is far too much truth in the saying. Even Christians conform to this world too readily, and think themselves excusable if they are but following the example of the great. It was argued that if Vashti refused obedience to her husband, the

ladies of Persia and Media might follow her example. If the queen and inferior ladies refused submission, might not all women in the kingdom do the same? Can any husband in the king's dominions expect greater submission from his wife than the king himself?

Public persons are by Plutarch compared to looking-glasses, according to which others dress themselves; to pictures in a glass window, wherein every blemish is soon seen; to common wells, which if they be poisoned, many are destroyed. The common people commonly are like a flock of cranes; as the first flies all follow.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 18. The king's nobles and princes trembled for their own authority and dignity. They were afraid to trust the good sense of their wives. No doubt their fears were just. What could be expected of women held in the bonds of ignorance and slavery, as the wives of the East generally were, but that they would attempt to snap their fetters? With the women of our land it is very different. They are greatly favoured, they ought therefore to prize their privileges. Wives, be obedient to your husbands. Contention and wrath in families is an evil of such magnitude, that the Persian princes thought it necessary to use the most vigorous and severe measures to prevent it.

Likewise shall the ladies . . . say. Say what? We will not do as our lords command us. Like enough all this, for their tongues were their own, and their wills no less. That free will, about which there is so much ado made, when once lost, the women caught it up; and hence they are so wedded to their own will, saith one merrily.—*Trapp*.

Contempt and wrath. Contempt on

the wives' part, and wrath on the husbands'; wives shall slight their husbands, and they again shall fall foul upon their wives; and the house they dwell together in shall be no better than a fencing-school, wherein the two sexes seem to have met together for nothing but to play their prizes, and to try masteries.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 19. *If it please the king*. Courtier-like, lest he should seem to prescribe to the king, or to prejudice the rest of the royal counsellors, he thus modestly prefaceth to his ensuing harsh and hard sentence. He knew well enough it would please the king at present, in the mind he was now in; and to prevent any alteration, he moves to have it made sure by an irrevocable law, that he might not hereafter be censured for this his immoderate and unmerciful censure, but to be sure to save one howsoever.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 20. This decree would probably inspire wives with fear, but would it not tend to make husbands greater tyrants? The wives will cringe and obey like schoolboys when their masters are present, but will they promote their husbands' interests and comforts? Let your wives share your happiness if you wish them to contribute to it; treat them with tenderness if you wish them to sympathize with you in times of distress. Let not their faults be blamed and punished until you can say that your behaviour has not tempted them to do wrong.

And when the king's decree shall be published. But why should any such thing be published at all, unless the king be ambitious of his own utter dishonour? Is there none wiser than another, but that the king must bewray his own nest, tell all the empire that he was drunk, or little better, and did in his drink determine that against his fair queen that he so soon after repented?

He should have done in this case as a man doth that, having a secret sore, clappeth on a plaister, and then covereth it with his hand, that it may stick the faster, work the better.—*Trapp*.

Persian law and gospel law. 1. Persian law was arbitrary, chiefly according to the caprice of the king; and it was cruel. This is seen in the case of Vashti. 2. Gospel law is righteous; it is founded upon God's justice and righteousness. Persian laws, being dictated by whim and caprice, were often degrading in their effects. But God's laws are always ennobling and exalting. God is ever ready to forgive. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Merciful is the gospel. "How often shall I forgive?" inquired Peter; "until seven times?" "Yea, until seventy times seven," said the King of heaven.

Envy. Envy intrudes itself into all positions. It affects princes and courtiers. It is cruel in its nature and design, and seeks always to bring down. It is subtle in its movements, and disastrous in its results.

Wicked counsel. The counsel of the wicked is—1. Natural to a depraved heart. The carnal mind is enmity against God. To follow the counsel of the wicked is to swim with the stream. 2. Popular—the way of the multitude. To put it far away is to be singular. It is not always easy to come out and be separate; yet we must. 3. Pleasing to the flesh. Sin wears a serpent's skin, and carries a serpent's sting. The forbidden fruit is pleasing to the eye and sweet to the taste. But true counsellors will set aside all respect for private interests; will keep their eyes fixed upon the public good; and will seek to avoid injustice, though thereby their own interests be endangered.—*Rev. C. Leach, F.G.S.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 21, 22.

VASHTI IS STRIPPED OF QUEENLY EXTERNALS.

Popular oratory is very frequently only the art of articulating the wishes and desires of the multitude. Skill is required at once to comprehend, as if by intuition,

those desires ; to put them in attractive form, and to speak them forth as if they were novel ideas ; but the man is untrue to himself who is determined that his sayings shall please the kings and the princes who hold in their hands his reputation for oratory. And Memucan had caught the trick of popular oratory. His words were the expression of the king's then present feeling, and the interpretation of the desires and fears of the listening and applauding courtiers. And we are not surprised to read that the saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. All was put in motion. The post-horses galloped from stage to stage. It is the proverbial and figurative statement that they flew swifter than the cranes. The postmasters took from the couriers the king's letters which proclaimed the queen's degradation ; which, to those who looked beneath the surface, set forth the king's rage more than his desire that every man should bear rule in his own house. And soon throughout the whole realm the story of Vashti's fall was heard. It was widely known that her crown was taken away, and that she was lowered from her high estate. And doubtless none were found brave enough to speak in her defence. It would be then, as it is too often now, that all forsook in the dark day of her disaster. Those who flattered her beauty when she was queen would depreciate it when she was unqueened. Those who fawned in the day of prosperity would either "damn with faint praise" her daring spirit, or bluster about her disgusting arrogance, in the day of adversity. We do not hear of any consoling or defending voice being lifted up for her help when she had incurred the king's wrath. Let us hope that she was not quite friendless and forsaken. But so far as the narrative is concerned we do not hear of any such voice, or of any faithful adherents. Undefended she fell. Grasping tenaciously the banner of right she was slain. A lonely wanderer she went forth from the palace gates. Or if she still remained an inhabitant of the king's harem, the lowest menials might scout her presence. Her tears might be her meat day and night for a season ; but though no human hand wiped away those tears, yet an approving conscience might bring untold consolation in the hours of distress, and she that sowed in tears might afterwards reap in joy. A victim she to a mistaken sense of what was right, as some would declare. But oh, it is noble thus to fall. Better and more glorious is it thus to suffer, through even a mistaken sense of duty, than to let moralities and scruples take care of themselves for fear they should stand in the way of advancement, or help on the spoliation of worldly wealth and honours.

Here learn—1. *That virtue is not always successful in this world.* It is only a supposition for the purpose of supporting a foregone conclusion that Vashti was reinstated. Our narrative does not state anything of the kind, and this is the only authentic history of Vashti's career. Now it has been said that God makes innocence of soul ever prosper. This is true spiritually, but is not always true as the world accounts prosperity. Novelists, in making virtue triumphant and vice finally a failure in this world, simply set forth that which is in harmony with our conceptions of *what ought to be* ; but then it is plain enough that all things are not as they ought to be in this disordered universe. The Vashtis are not reinstated ; the Josephs are not always taken out of prison and placed on thrones ; the Jobs do not invariably find that the last earthly state is better than the first. Johns are sometimes beheaded in prison, and Peters are crucified. It would take great skill to show that Paul had made "the best of this world." He did not seem to think so himself, and he ought to have been a good judge. Certainly it was not "a best" that would be chosen by those who advocate the possibility of making the best of both worlds. Apostles and reformers have endured poverty, persecution, and martyrdom. Genius has pined away in garrets ; greatness has been trampled upon by littleness ; shrewd business men have ground down their superiors ; virtue has been hidden in dens and caves of the earth ; truth, with sad heart, has wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins. And the world's

greatest heroes have not infrequently been the world's greatest sufferers. 2. *That virtue uncrowned is better than vice crowned.* This may do in theory, but will not be accepted in practice by the vast majority. In our eagerness to catch or to preserve the perishable crowns of earth we let our principles go to the winds. Still wrong-doers even applaud right doing. And however that may be, an approving conscience will sustain, though time-serving courtiers and angry monarchs oppress, and pass their stringent measures of banishment, of confiscation, and even of death. Virtue is nobler in a miserable hut than vice in a splendid palace. Lazarus was more royal in his rags than Dives in his purple and fine linen. A true-hearted Vashti is richer in her very degradation than the enthroned and worshipped Ahasuerus. Behind the outward glitter was the inward gnawing of a reproachful memory. But behind the cloud of Vashti's shame might be the cheering light of conscious integrity. And in this sense the good man may make the best of both worlds. Earthly crowns may be taken away, but the crown of Divine approval cannot be removed by any external force. 3. *That the path of duty is the way to lasting glory.* If Vashti had possessed a prudential regard to her own safety, her name might not have been heard of outside the palace. But now multitudes have heard her name, and wherever this book travels a memorial will be raised to tell of her womanly modesty and her heroic dignity. And no deed done in a right spirit shall perish; for nothing is lost in the material universe, and much less can there be loss in the moral universe. Those who fight in Virtue's cause may fall on the battle-field, but they conquer by their seeming defeats, and their wounds, by Divine grace, through the atoning merits of the Saviour, will be productive of immortal honours. We cannot follow Vashti in her journeyings and watch her entering the palace beautiful. But this is certain—those who love and serve the better King, Jesus Christ; those who come to him in true penitence and childlike faith, will never be cast out because they have done wrong even, if the wrong-doing was unintentional; and his followers will not do wrong designedly and with the full consent of their renewed natures. The Divine Bridegroom asks not that the bride be perfect in knowledge, not that she be free from error in judgment, but that she be perfect in love.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 21, 22.

Ver. 21. We do not wonder that the king was pleased with a proposal that gratified his pride and anger. The princes, too, were pleased with a law which flattered their vanity and sanctioned their domestic tyranny.

And the saying pleased the king. Pity but itching ears should have clawing counsellors. Memucan was a fit helve for such a hatchet, and his advice fit lettuce for such lips. What marvel that such a counsellor pleased the king, when as he had before given place to two such bad counsellors—wine and anger! How rare a jewel in a prince's ear is a faithful counsellor, that will deliver himself fully, not to please but to profit.—*Tripp.*

Ver. 22. The king not only divorces his queen, but publishes a decree through all his dominions, that every

man should bear rule in his own house. This is the law of God.

The safety and honour of a prince is in virtue, not unrighteous laws.

Whether it was the passion or the policy of the king that was served by this edict, God's providence served its own purpose by it, which was to make way for Esther the queen.—*Matthew Henry.*

The king and the princes approve this heavy judgment of Memucan's. No doubt many messages passed ere the rigour of this execution. That great heart knows not to relent, but will rather break than yield to an humble deprecation. When the stone and the steel meet fire is stricken: it is a soft answer that appeaseth wrath. Vashti is cast off.—*Bishop Hall.*

It was unanimously resolved, with a

wise regard to the public interests of the nation, that the punishment of Vashti could be nothing less than degradation from her royal dignity. The doom was accordingly pronounced and made known in all parts of the empire.—*Port. Commentary.*

We do not ourselves wonder, that, when the king's high council—his wise men—came to consider the matter, they decided that Vashti must have her diadem taken from her. They saw, also, that the question was one of near interest to themselves; for if it went abroad, as it was sure to do, that the queen had flatly refused to obey even the king of kings, what had they and

the other princes of the land to expect in their own families from the example if this high crime were not condignly punished? But one is amazed at the infantine simplicity of these famous sages in recommending the issue of a royal decree in all the languages of this great empire—"that every man should bear rule in his own house." This is, undoubtedly, one of the most amusing things in all history. One cannot but imagine the inextinguishable burst of shrill merriment which rung through every one of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the Persian empire when this sage decree was promulgated.—*Dr. Kitto.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE WHOLE CHAPTER.

This book presents us with impressive views of man with and without grace; of the great instability of human affairs; of the sovereign power, justice, and faithfulness of the Supreme Being. We now call your attention to the first chapter.

I. The king of Persia at this time was Ahasuerus. Commentators differ about him. He was a heathen—a stranger to God—possessing extensive dominions. His was the second of the four great empires. These empires have come to nought; but, brethren, there is a kingdom which passeth not away. Its King will remain in heaven for ever. Let us be numbered among its subjects.

II. This mighty potentate, Ahasuerus, wished to make a display of his greatness: made a feast—the power of Media and Persia present—he exhibited his riches, and honour, and glory. Notice his pride. Beware of pride. Pray that you may habitually remember what you are—poor, fallen sinners.

III. At this feast, though a heathen one, moderation was observed. "And the drinking was according to law: none did compel." Intemperance is an abomination and a degradation; hence we should flee from it.

IV. But though the feast of Ahasuerus was free from the disgrace of compelling the guests to proceed to drunkenness, yet did very evil consequences result from it. It is but seldom that such meetings are free from such consequences. We read of Belshazzar's feast; we read of Herod's feast. In such entertainments God is liable to be forgotten. Solomon, who with extraordinary diligence, and unparalleled success, had examined and tried the sources of all earthly gratification, tells us, in language which ought never to be out of remembrance, that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting."

V. Let us consider the evil which was occasioned by the feast.—The king ordered the queen to be brought. She refused to come. The wrath of the king was kindled. The result was a council, then the divorcement of the queen. Quarrels, animosities, and heart-burnings are so contrary to that religion of love which a received gospel generates, that we ought to strive to the utmost for the preservation of the opposite virtues. Christ is the Prince of Peace; let us not only trust in his death for salvation, but imitate his meekness and lowliness of heart.

Two short remarks shall close this discourse :—1. It behoveth us to lead excellent lives, and the higher we are placed in the community the more ought this to be the object of our ambition. Let our lives be continual sermons to those among whom we live. 2. It behoveth us to regard the duties which appertain to the relations of life in which we are placed. “Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God.”—*Hughes*.

I. The vast extent of the Persian empire. It comprehended all the countries from the river Indus on the east to the Mediterranean on the west; and from the Black Sea and Caspian in the north to the extreme south of Arabia, then called Ethiopia. This gigantic dominion was divided into 127 provinces or governments, each of which was placed under a satrap, or, in modern language, a pasha, who managed its affairs, and annually transmitted a certain sum as revenue to the king. The *seat* of government was variable, according to the season of the year, the summer months being spent by the court at Ecbatana, and the winter months at Susa, or, as it is called in this chapter, Shushan, the palace. The *form* of government in the East has from the earliest times been despotic, one man swaying the destinies of millions, and having under him a crowd of smaller despots, each in his more limited sphere oppressing the people subjected to his rule. 1. Despotism has its occasional fits of generosity and kindness. It is as kind-hearted that Ahasuerus is brought before you in the early part of this chapter. He was spending the winter months at Susa. The retinue of the monarch was vast, and the fountains and gardens were on a scale of grandeur which we cannot well conceive. There, then, the king, but little concerned about the welfare of his subjects, was spending his time, chiefly in selfish ease and unbounded revelry. To him it was of no moment how his people were oppressed by those whom he set over them; his sole concern was to enjoy his pleasures. 2. With all the luxury and temptation to self-indulgence, there was no compulsion employed to draw any one beyond the bounds of temperance. The law was good, but the king himself had too largely used the liberty, and hence his loss of self-control and all sense of propriety. When heated with wine he sent for Vashti, &c. Lessons suggested are—(1) Extravagancies and follies into which men are betrayed by intemperance. (2) That which dethrones reason and destroys intellect should surely be avoided. (3) All the consequences which affect the man individually, and others also, rest upon the head of the transgressor. (4) Intemperance (*a*) blots out distinction between right and wrong; (*b*) foment all the evil passions of the natural heart; (*c*) destroys the proper exercise of the power of the will; (*d*) and often inflicts grievous wounds upon the innocent, as the case of Vashti here already demonstrates. (5) The necessity of guarding against these evils.

II. The evils which arose from the peculiar family arrangements of those countries. We take occasion here to observe two great evils :—1. The condition of the female sex was that of degradation. The married woman was not really what the Divine institution intended her to be, the true companion and friend of her husband. She was kept in a state of seclusion, real freedom she knew not; she was, in truth, only a slave, having power to command some other slaves. She was without education, and generally unintelligent, frivolous, and heartless. She was guarded with zealous care, as if she had been very precious, but at the same time she was wholly dependent upon the caprices of her lord. 2. Yet, strangely enough, in the second place, it is to be noticed that, as if to afford evidence that the law of nature cannot be trampled upon with impunity, it very frequently happened that the female influence was felt by the despotic husband, so as to make him in reality the slave. Not conscious of it, but imagining that he held the place of absolute authority, he was himself governed; yet not through the power of real affection, but through the imbecile doting which constituted all that he knew of real affection. Common history

abounds with illustrations of this fact, and in the sacred history we have examples of the same kind; David, Solomon, and Ahab are instances. There is never a violation of God's righteous appointments, but it is followed by some penalty. From this Book of Esther, it appears very obviously that Ahasuerus, with all his caprices and his stern, imperious self-will, was at first completely under the influence of Vashti, as he afterwards came to be under that of Esther. The whole domestic system being unnaturally constructed, there was, of necessity, derangements in the conducting of it. The despot might be one day all tenderness and submission, and the next day he might, to gratify his humour, exact from his slaves what, a short time afterwards, he would have counted it absolutely wrong in himself to command, and punishable in them to do.

III. The degradation of Vashti. We have to look at the circumstances which are brought before us in the narrative. At a season when sound counsel could scarcely have been expected, and when he who sought it was not in a fit condition to profit by it, the serious question was proposed by the king, "What shall be done to Vashti?" &c. To defer the consideration of so grave a subject to a more fitting season would have been so clearly the path which a wise counsellor would have recommended, that we feel astonished that it was not at once suggested. But the wrath of the king was so strongly exhibited that his compliant advisers did not venture to contradict him. "Memucan answered," &c. Now, with respect to this opinion of the chief counsellor, it may be observed that it was based upon a principle which in itself is unquestionably right, although there was a wrong application made of it. Rank and station, while they command a certain measure of respect, involve very deep responsibility. Fashions and maxims usually go downward from one class of society to another. Customs, adopted by the higher orders as their rule, gradually make their way until at length they pervade all ranks. Thus far Memucan spoke wisely, when he pointed to the example of the queen as that which would certainly have an influence, wherever it came to be known, throughout the empire. But the principle, in the present instance, was wrongly applied when it was made the ground of condemning the conduct of Vashti. The design was to make her appear guilty of an act of insubordination, which it was necessary for the king to punish, if he would promote the good of his subjects, whereas, in reality, she had upon her side all the authority of law and custom, and was to be made the victim both of the ungovernable wrath of the king, who was beside himself with wine, and also of flatterers who, to gratify him, would do wrong to the innocent. See here the danger of flattery.

Let us extract some practical lessons from our subject. 1. The inadequacy of all earthly good to make man truly happy. Surveying the whole scene portrayed in the early verses of this chapter, we might imagine that the sovereign who ruled over this empire, upon whose nod the interests of so many millions depended, and for whose pleasure the product of so many various climes could be gathered together, had surely all the elements of enjoyment at his command. . . . And yet we must say that the mightiest sovereign of his time, with 127 provinces subject to him, with princes serving him, and slaves kissing the dust at his feet, was not half so happy as the humblest individual here, who knows what is meant by the comforts of home, where he is in the midst of those who love him. 2. A few remarks may be offered upon the domestic question here settled by the king and his counsellors, as to the supremacy of man in his own house. How could they pronounce a sound judgment upon a question which their customs prevented them from rightly knowing? 3. We have in the text a law spoken of which changeth not. And, my friends, there is such a law, but it is not the law of the Medes and Persians, it is the law of the Eternal. Jehovah's law changeth not. And what does it say? "This do and live." "Cursed is every one that continueth

not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." That seals us all up under wrath. But we turn the page, and we read and see that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness." And is not this our conclusion, then—"I will flee from the curse of the immutable law, and shelter myself under the righteousness of Christ, which is also perfect and immutable, that through him and from him I may have mercy and eternal life"?—*Dr. Davidson.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER I.

Power. Pompey boasted, that, with one stamp of his foot, he could rouse all Italy to arms; with one scratch of his pen, Ahasuerus could call to his assistance the forces of 127 provinces; but God, by one word of his mouth, one movement of his will, can summon the inhabitants of heaven, earth, and the undiscovered worlds to his aid, or bring new creatures into being to do his will.

Dignity. A French doctor once taunted Flechier, Bishop of Nismes, who had been a tallow-chandler in his youth, with the meanness of his origin; to which he replied, "If you had been born in the same condition that I was, you would still have been but a maker of candles."

Great men. Columbus was the son of a weaver, and a weaver himself. Cervantes was a common soldier. Homer was the son of a small farmer. Demosthenes was the son of a cutler. Terence was a slave. Oliver Cromwell was the son of a London brewer. Howard was an apprentice to a grocer. Franklin was a journeyman printer, and son of a tallow-chandler and soap-boiler. Dr. Thomas, Bishop of Worcester, was the son of a linen-draper. Daniel Defoe was a hostler, and son of a butcher. Whitfield was the son of an innkeeper at Gloucester. Virgil was the son of a porter. Horace was the son of a shopkeeper. Shakespeare was the son of a woolstapler. Milton was the son of a money scrivener. Robert Burns was a ploughman in Ayrshire. Yet all these rose to eminence.

How to make a feast. "Lord Chief Justice Hall frequently invited his poor neighbours to dinner, and made them sit at table with himself. If any of them were sick, so that they could not come, he would send provisions to them warm from his table."

Favour of God. It was the saying of a wise Roman, "I had rather have the esteem of the Emperor Augustus than his gifts;" for he was an honourable, understanding prince, and his favour very honourable. When Cyrus gave one of his friends a kiss, and another a wedge of gold, he that had the gold envied him that had the kiss as a greater expression of his favour. So the true Christian prefers the privilege of acceptance with God to the possession of any earthly comfort, for in the light of his countenance is life, and his favour is as the cloud of the latter rain.—*Butler.*

Pride of wealth. Alcibiades was one day

boasting of his wealth and great estate, when Socrates placed a map before him, and asked him to find Attica. It was insignificant on the map; but he found it. "Now," said the philosopher, "point out your own estate." "It is too small to be distinguished in so little a space," was the answer. "See, then!" said Socrates, "how much you are affected about an imperceptible point of land."

Your bags of gold should be ballast in your vessel to keep her always steady, instead of being topsails to your masts to make your vessel giddy. Give me that distinguished person, who is rather pressed down under the weight of all his honours, than puffed up with the blast thereof. It has been observed by those who are experienced in the sport of angling, that the smallest fishes bite the tastest. Oh, how few *great men* do we find so much as nibbling at the gospel hook.—*Secker.*

Abuse of wealth. I am no advocate for meanness of private habitation. I would fain introduce into it all magnificence, care, and beauty, when they are possible; but I would not have that useless expense in unnoticed fineries or formalities—carving of ceilings, and graining of doors, and fringing of curtains, and thousands of such things—which have become foolishly and apathetically habitual. . . . I speak from experience: I know what it is to live in a cottage with a deal floor and roof, and a hearth of mica-slate; I know it to be in many respects healthier and happier than living between a Turkey carpet and a gilded ceiling, beside a steel grate and polished fender. I do not say that such things have not their place and propriety; but I say this emphatically, that a tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic comforts and encumbrances, would, if collectively afforded and wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England.—*Ruskin.*

Danger. "A boy climbing among the Alps saw some flowers on the verge of a precipice, and sprang forward to get them. The guide shouted his warnings; but the heedless boy grasped the flowers, and fell a thousand feet upon the rocks below with them in his hand. It was a dear price for such frail things, but he is not the only victim of such folly."

Danger of prosperity. When Crates threw his gold into the sea, he cried out, *Ego perdam te, ne tu perdas me*, that is, "I will destroy you, lest

you should destroy me." Thus, if the world be not put to death here, it will put us to death hereafter. Then we shall say, as Cardinal Wolsey, when discarded by his prince and abandoned to the fury of his enemies: "If I had served my God as faithfully as my king, he would not have thus forsaken me." Poor man! all the perfumes on earth are unable to prevail over the stench of hell.—*Secker*.

In a long sunshine of outward prosperity, the dust of our inward corruptions is apt to fly about and lift itself up. Sanctified affliction, like seasonable rain, lays the dust, and softens the soul.—*Salter*.

When fire is put to green wood there comes out abundance of watery stuff that before appeared not; when the pond is empty, the mud, the filth, and toads come to light. The snow covers many a dunghill, so doth prosperity many a rotten heart. It is easy to wade in a warm bath, and every bird can sing in a sunshiny day. Hard weather tries what health we have; afflictions try what sap we have, what grace we have. Withered leaves soon fall off in windy weather, rotten boughs quickly break with heavy weights, &c.—*Brooks*.

Some of you glory in your shame, that you have drunk down your companions, and carried it away—the honour of a sponge or a tub, which can drink up or hold liquor as well as you.—*Barter*.

We commend wine for the excellency of it; but if it could speak, as it can take away speech, it would complain that, by our abuse, both the excellencies are lost; for the excellent man doth so spoil the excellent wine, until the excellent wine hath spoiled the excellent man. Oh, that a man should take pleasure in that which makes him no man; that he should let a thief in at his mouth to steal away his wit; that for a little throat indulgence he should kill in himself both the first Adam—his reason, and even the second Adam—his regeneration, and so commit two murders at once.—*Adams*.

An earnest young minister was in the house of a rich friend. He was pressed to take wine, but refused. It was again pressed upon him. At length he yielded to their importunities, and drank a little. Gradually he formed a liking for wine, and at length began taking far too much. By degrees, and almost before he was aware of it, he became a drunkard. He was degraded from his office of the ministry, and sank lower and lower. Years after he had been pressed to drink by his rich friend, he came again to his door; this time to beg for a little food, and was ordered away as a drunken vagabond.

Joseph Ralston, of Philipsburg, Penn., met with a horrible death by freezing. He had been drinking freely, and had, while drunk, to wade the Moslandoo Creek; but, ere he proceeded two-thirds of the way, his limbs refused to perform their office. He grasped a bough of an overhanging tree, unable to advance farther; and soon the fast-congealing water cemented close about him—a tomb of ice which stretched from shore to shore. Two days after he was found there rigid as an icicle, his knees embedded in a sheet of the frozen element seven inches

thick, his body inclined a little forwards, his hands clutched the boughs, eyes astare, and despair pictured on his features.—*Pittsburgh Dispatch*.

God trieth men's love to him by their keeping his commandments. It was the aggravation of the first sin that they would not deny so small a thing as the forbidden fruit, in obedience to God! And so it is of thine, that will not leave a forbidden cup for him. O miserable wretch! dost thou not know thou canst not be Christ's disciple if thou forsake not all for him, and hate not even thy life in comparison of him, and wouldst die rather than forsake him? And thou like to lay down thy life for him, who wilt not leave a cup of drink for him? Canst thou burn at a stake for him, that canst not leave an ale-house, or vain company, or excess, for him? What a sentence of condemnation dost thou pass upon thyself!—*Barter*.

Not in the day of thy drunkenness only dost thou undergo the harm of drunkenness, but also after that day. And as when a fever is passed by, the mischievous consequences of the fever remain, so also when drunkenness is passed, the disturbance of intoxication is whirling round both body and soul. And while the wretched body lies paralyzed, like the hull of a vessel after a shipwreck, the soul, yet more miserable than it, even when this is ended, stirs up the storm and kindles desire; and when one seems to be sober, then most of all is he mad, imagining to himself wine and casks, cups and goblets.—*Chrysostom*.

"If you have gluttoned yourselves with worldly pleasures, it is no wonder that you should find an unsavoury taste in spiritual delights. Doves that are already filled find cherries bitter."—*J. Lyth, D.D.*

Bountiful King. The Lord, like a most bountiful king, will be angry if any man will ask a small thing at his hands; because he had rather give things of great worth than of small value. His goodness is infinite.—*Powell*.

Fulness of Christ. I have found it an interesting thing to stand at the edge of a noble rolling river, and to think, that although it has been flowing on for 6000 years, watering the fields, and slaking the thirst of a hundred generations, it shows no sign of waste or want. And when I have watched the rise of the sun as he shot above the crest of the mountain, or, in a sky draped with golden curtains, sprung up from his ocean bed, I have wondered to think that he has melted the snows of so many winters, and renewed the verdure of so many springs, and planted the flowers of so many summers, and ripened the golden harvest of so many autumns, and yet shines as brilliantly as ever; his eye not dim, nor his natural strength abated, nor his floods of lightness fail, for centuries of boundless profusion. Yet what are these but images of the fulness that is in Christ! Let that feed your hopes, and cheer your hearts, and brighten your faith, and send you away this day happy and rejoicing! For when judgment flames have licked up that flowing stream, and the light of that glorious sun shall be quenched in darkness, or veiled in the smoke of a burning world, the

fulness of Christ shall flow on through eternity in the bliss of the redeemed. Blessed Saviour! Image of God! Divine Redeemer! In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. What thou hast gone to heaven to prepare, may we be called up at death to enjoy!—*Dr. Guthrie*.

Wife. "And now let us see whether the word 'wife' has not a lesson. It literally means a weaver. The wife is the person who weaves. Before our great cotton and cloth factories arose, one of the principal employments in every house was the fabrication of clothing; every family made its own. The wool was spun into threads by the girls, who were therefore called *spinsters*; the thread was woven into cloth by their mother, who, accordingly, was called the weaver, or the wife; and another remnant of this old truth we discover in the word 'heirloom,' applied to any old piece of furniture which has come down to us from our ancestors, and which, though it may be a chair or bed, shows that a loom was an important article in every house. Thus the word 'wife' means weaver; and, as Trench well remarks, 'in the word itself is wrapped up a hint of earnest, indoor, stay-at-home occupation, as being fitted for her who bears the name.'"

Pleasures. The pleasures of the world surfeit with satisfying, while heavenly pleasures satisfy without surfeiting. The surfeited nature of the sensualist requires a constantly increasing stimulus to rouse his used-up powers, but with each advance in Christian enjoyment there is an increased power to appreciate heavenly joys. The pleasures of the world are like the kiss of Judas, given but to betray; the pleasures of heaven make the soul bright and beautiful, as when the face of Moses was transformed by the vision of God.—*J. G. Pilkington*.

Pleasures. Pleasures, like the rose, are sweet, but prickly; the honey doth not counter-vail the sting; all the world's delights are vanity, and end in vexation; like Judas, while they kiss, they betray. I would neither be a stone nor an epicure; allow of no pleasure, nor give way to all; they are good sauce, but naught to make a meal of. I may use them sometimes for digestion, never for food.—*Henshaw*.

Price of pleasure. Goethe, in his "Faust," introduces for his hero a student longing for the pleasures of knowledge. The devil appears, to seduce him from his pursuit; Faust is to have all possible sensual enjoyment in life, but is to pay for it by yielding his soul to the devil at last. At the end, Mephistopheles, jealous of his claim, appears and carries off his victim, the student's lost soul.

Anger. I am naturally as irritable as any; but when I find anger, or passion, or any other evil temper, arises in my mind, immediately I go to my Redeemer, and, confessing my sins, I give myself up to be managed by him.—*Clarke*.

Anger subdued. Two good men on some occasion had a warm dispute; and remembering the exhortation of the Apostle, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," just before sunset one of them went to the other, and knocking at the door, his offended friend came and opened it,

and seeing who it was, started back in astonishment and surprise; the other, at the same time, cried out, "The sun is almost down." Thus unexpected salutation softened the heart of his friend into affection, and he returned for answer, "Come in, brother, come in." What a happy method of conciliating matters, of redressing grievances, and of reconciling brethren!—*Arvine*.

Hypocrisy. A very capital painter in London exhibited a piece representing a friar habited in his canonicals. View the painting at a distance, and you would think the friar to be in a praying attitude: his hands are clasped together and held horizontally to his breast, his eyes meekly demitted like those of the publican in the gospel; and the good man appears to be quite absorbed in humble adoration and devout recollection. But take a nearer survey, and the deception vanishes; the book which seemed to be before him is discovered to be a punch-bowl, into which the wretch is all the while in reality only squeezing a lemon. How lively a representation of a hypocrite!—*Salter*.

Idols. A man's idol is not necessarily an image of gold; it may be a child of clay, the fruit of his own loins, or the wife of his bosom; it may be wealth, fame, position, success, or business—anything which absorbs unduly the affections and attention. Against all such the Almighty pronounces the decree: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and hurls his resistless missiles of destruction. Either ourselves or our idols must be destroyed.

Idolatry! You cannot find any more gross, any more cruel, on the broad earth, than within the area of a mile around this pulpit. Dark minds, from which God is obscured; deluded souls, whose fetish is the dice-box or the bottle; apathetic spirits, steeped in sensual abomination, unmoved by a moral ripple, soaking in the swamp of animal vitality; false gods, more hideous, more awful than Moloch or Baal, worshipped with shrieks, worshipped with curses, with the hearthstone for the bloody altar, and the drunken husband for the immolating priest, and women and children for the victims.—*Dr. Chapin*.

Loss of time. We are doomed to suffer a bitter pang as often as the irrevocable flight of our time is brought home with keenness to our hearts. The spectacle of the lady floating over the sea in a boat, and waking suddenly from sleep to find her magnificent ropes of pearl necklace by some accident detached from its fastening at one end, the loose string hanging down into the water, and pearl after pearl slipping off for ever into the abyss, brings before us the sadness of the case. That particular pearl which at the very moment is rolling off into the unsearchable deep, carries its own separate reproach to the lady's heart, but is more deeply reproachful as the representative of so many other uncounted pearls that have already been swallowed up irrecoverably while yet she was sleeping, of many, besides, that must follow before any remedy can be applied to what we may call this jewel's hemorrhage.

The intrepid judge. One of the favourites of

Henry V., when Prince of Wales, having been indicted for some misdemeanour, was condemned, notwithstanding all the interest he could make in his favour, and the prince was so incensed at the issue of the trial that he struck the judge on the bench. The magistrate, whose name was Sir William Gascoigne, acted with a spirit becoming his character. He instantly ordered the prince to be committed to prison, and young Henry, sensible by this time of the insult he had offered to the laws of his country, suffered himself to be quietly conducted to jail by the officers of justice. The king, Henry IV., who was an excellent judge of mankind, was no sooner informed of this transaction, than he cried out in a transport of joy, "Happy is the king who has a magistrate possessed of courage to execute the laws, and still more happy in having a son who will submit to such chastisement."—*Arrive.*

Flattery. The coin most current among mankind is flattery: the only benefit of which is, that, by hearing what we are not, we may learn what we ought to be.

Whitfield, when flattered, said, "Take care of fire: I carry powder about me."

A flattering priest told Constantine the Great that his virtues deserved the empire of the world here, and to reign with the Son of God hereafter. The emperor cried, "Fie, fie, for shame; let me hear no more such unseemly speeches; but, rather, suppliantly pray to my Almighty Maker, that, in this life and the life to come, I may be reckoned worthy to be his servant."

Excuses. He that does amiss never lacks excuse. Any excuse will serve when one has not a mind to do a thing. The archer that shoots ill has a lie ready. He that excuses himself accuses himself. A bad workman always complains of his tools.

Wicked counsel. A young man devoted himself to a religious life. His ungodly parents sent him many letters to dissuade him. Being fully decided to go on in his chosen course, when any letters came addressed to him he threw them into the fire at once, without opening them. When friends and kindred stand between us and Christ, they must be disregarded.

Sin. Sin is like the little serpent *aspis*, which stings men, whereby they fall into a pleasant sleep, and in that sleep die.—*Steinbock.*

Envy. We shall find it in Cain, the proto-murderer, who slew his brother at the instigation of envy. We shall find it in the dark, and gloomy, and revengeful spirit of Saul, who, under the influence of envy, plotted for years the slaughter of David. We shall find it in the king of Israel, when he pined for the vineyard of Naboth, and shed his blood to gain it. Yea; it was envy that perpetrated that most atrocious crime ever planned in hell or executed on earth, on which the sun refused to look, and at which nature gave signs of abhorrence by the rending of the rocks—I mean the crucifixion of Christ, for the evangelist tells us that for envy the Jews delivered our Lord.—*J. A. James.*

The poets imagined that envy dwelt in a dark cave; being pale and lean-looking as guilt, abounding with gall, her teeth black, never rejoicing but in the misfortunes of others; ever

unquiet and careful, and continually tormenting herself.—*Wiz.*

Friendship. True friendship can only be made between true men. Hearts are the soul of honour. There can be no lasting friendship between bad men. Bad men may pretend to love each other; but their friendship is a rope of sand, which shall be broken at any convenient season. But if a man have a sincere heart within him, and be true and noble, then we may confide in him.—*Spurgeon.*

Ingratitude. A petted soldier of the Macedonian army was shipwrecked, and cast upon the shore apparently lifeless. A hospitable Macedonian discovered him, revived him, took him to his home, and treated him in a princely manner, and, when he departed, gave him money for his journey. The rescued soldier expressed warm thanks, and promised royal bounty to his benefactor. Instead, when he came before Philip, he related his own misfortunes, and asked to be rewarded by the lands and house of his rescuer. His request was granted, and he returned, and drove out his former host. The latter hastened to lay the true state before the king; when he restored the land, and caused the soldier to be branded in the forehead, "The Ungrateful Guest," as the reward of his baseness.

Conscience wakeful. Though in many men conscience sleeps in regard to motion, yet it never sleeps in regard to observation and notice. It may be hard and scared, it can never be blind. Like letters written with the juice of lemon, that which is written upon it, though seemingly invisible and illegible, when brought before the fire of God's judgment, shall come forth clear and expressive.—*McCosh.*

Guilty conscience. It gives a terrible form and a horrible voice to everything beautiful and musical without. Let Byron describe its anguish, for who felt it more than he?—

"The mind that broods o'er guilty woes
Is like the scorpion girt by fire;
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captive close,
Till only searched by thousand throes,
And maddening in her ire,
One sad and sole relief she knows—
The sting she nourished for her foes;
Whose venom never yet was vain,
Gives but one pang, and cures all pain,
And darts into her desperate brain;
So do the dark in soul expire,
Or live like scorpion girt with fire.
So writhes the mind remorse has riven,
Unfit for earth, doomed for heaven,
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death."

Forgiveness. As the prince or ruler only has power to forgive treason in his subjects, so God only has power to forgive sin. As no man can forgive a debt unto the creditor to whom the debt is due, so God only can forgive us our debts, whose debtors we are to an incalculable amount. But we know that he is always ready to forgive. "He keeps mercy for thousands, and pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin."

Forgiveness. In a school in Ireland, one boy

struck another, and when he was about to be punished, the injured boy begged for his pardon. The master asked, "Why do you wish to keep him from being flogged?" The boy replied, "I have read in the New Testament that our Lord Jesus Christ said that we should forgive our enemies; and, therefore, I forgive him, and beg he may not be punished for my sake."

At the present day the green turban which marks descent from Mahomet is often worn in the East by the very poor, and even by beggars. In our own history the glory of the once illus-

trious Plantagenets so completely waned, that the direct representative of Margaret Plantagenet, daughter and heiress of George, Duke of Clarence, followed the trade of a cobbler in Newport, Shropshire, in 1637. Among the lineal descendants of Edmund of Woodstock, sixth son of Edward I., and entitled to quarter the royal arms, were a village butcher and a keeper of a turnpike gate; and among the descendants of Thomas Plantagenet, Duke of Gloucester, fifth son of Edward III., was included the late sexton of a London church.—*Geikie*.

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. **After these things]** How long after the divorce of Vashti is uncertain. It may have been only a few months, or it may have been a year or more after. **He remembered Vashti]** And along with the remembrance came a desire to have her restored to favour again, and probably, also, a feeling that she had been too severely dealt with. 2.] The youths, or male domestics, without regard to age, that served before the king, sought to avert the danger that threatened. They advised that maidens, virgins, be brought to the king, and that these should be beautiful to look upon. 3. **The house of the women]** The harem was always an essential part of an Oriental palace. In the Persian palaces it was very extensive, since the Persian monarchs maintained, besides their legitimate wives, as many as three hundred or four hundred concubines. Here, strictly speaking, seems to have been "keeper of the virgins" only, since the concubines were under the care of Shaashgaz.—*Rawlinson*. **Things of purification]** Cleansing and anointing with precious oils. 5.] Jair, Shimei, and Kish can hardly mean the father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of Mordecai. On the contrary, if Jair were perhaps his father, Shimei and Kish may have been the names of renowned ancestors.. Shimei was probably the son of Gera, and Kish the father of Saul; for in genealogical series only a few noted names are generally given. Upon the ground of this explanation, Josephus makes Esther of royal descent, viz., the line of Saul, king of Israel; and the Targum regards Shimei as the Benjamite who cursed David. It is more in accordance with the Hebrew narrative style to refer the relative to the chief person of the sentence preceding it, viz., Mordecai, who also continues to be spoken of in ver. 7. Hence we prefer this reference, without, however, attributing to Mordecai more than one hundred and twenty years of age. For the relative clause, who had been carried away, need not be so strictly understood as to assert that Mordecai himself was carried away; but the object being to give merely his origin and lineage, and not his history, it involves only the notion that he belonged to those Jews who were carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar with Jeconiah, so that he, though born in captivity, was carried to Babylon in the persons of his forefathers.—*Keil*. 7. **Hadassah, that is, Esther]** Tyrwhitt regards *Hadassah* as the court name, by which she was known among the Persians, and *Esther* as her Jewish maiden name, by which she was known to her own people. But to this it may be fairly replied that she would be more likely to be known to her own people as well as to the Persians by her royal name; and most interpreters have naturally understood from the expression, *he brought up Hadassah, which is Esther*, that *Hadassah* was her early maiden name, and that she took the name of *Esther* when she became queen. Moreover, *Hadassah* is of Semitic origin, and signifies *myrtle*; while *Esther* is the Persian word for *star*. The *fair and beautiful* maiden was known as *myrtle*; the brilliant and fascinating queen was called *star*. The name *Hadassah* is, indeed, substantially identical with *Atossa*, mentioned by the Greek writers as the wife of Darius Hystaspes, and daughter of Cyrus, but the identity in name is insufficient to identify the Jewish virgin with one who is so clearly represented by Herodotus as both daughter of Cyrus and widow of Cambyses.—*Whedon's Com.* **His uncle's daughter]** This uncle's name was Abihail (ver. 15). Mordecai and Esther were cousins, but Mordecai must have been the elder. 9. **Seven maidens]** Probably each of the virgins had the same number of maids to attend her; but Esther's maids were chosen with special care. It seems also that both Esther and her maids were favoured with the choicest apartments in the harem. 10. **Not showed her people]** This was a piece of wise policy on the part of her foster-father. He knew well that the Jews were not too popular, and had she beforehand declared that she belonged to the captive nation, her cause would have been next to hopeless. 11. **Mordecai . . . before the court of the women's house]** This leads us to suppose that he was an eunuch. It is not probable that he would, otherwise, have such access to the house of the women as it appears he had. It is the opinion of many that he was a royal porter having

charge of one of the principal gates. **13. Whatsoever she desired**] In the way of jewels, ornaments, or dress. "No doubt," says Rawlinson, "the virgins generally took the opportunity—one that would occur but once in their lives—to load themselves with precious ornaments of various kinds—necklaces, bracelets, earrings, anklets, and the like." **15. She required nothing**] She made no effort to adorn her person with jewellery or dress to please her own fancy, but left the matter entirely to Hecai, who would be likely to know best what would please the king. **16. Tebeth** (answering to part of our December and January), **in the seventh year of his reign**] Vashti was cast off in the third year of his reign (ver. 3); so that four years passed before another queen, or at least before Esther, was crowned in her stead. **18. Made a release to the provinces**] Usually understood as a release from tribute. The Persian kings were wont to remit the arrears of tribute due at the time of their accession; and Xerxes may have thought it wise to make such a release just after the disastrous Grecian wars. The feast, release, and gifts were, doubtless, in keeping with kingliness. **19. When the virgins, &c.**] Rather, "When virgins." These words should begin a new paragraph. They stand in contrast with those of verse 8, and serve in the mind of the writer to date the new event here narrated, viz., the discovery, by Mordecai, of the plot against the life of the king.—*Speaker's Com.* It appears that there was a *second* collection of virgins at Shushan, probably made some years after the first. After his unsuccessful wars Xerxes wholly abandoned himself to the pleasures of the court. We may thus understand his second gathering of virgins. **20. Esther had not yet showed, &c.**] This verse should be regarded as a parenthesis, and is designed as a circumstantial clause, to show that Esther was obedient to Mordecai as much after she became queen as before. It also shows that this second collection sprang from no prejudice against Esther as a Jewess. **21. Bigthan**] Probably the same as *Bigtha* (ch. i. 10). Called *Bigthana* in ch. vi. 2. **Which kept the door**] Lit., *guards of the threshold*. Being doorkeepers, like Mordecai, the latter was able the more readily to learn of their conspiracy. Such conspiracies among the officers of the court were common in the East, and many a monarch (and subsequently even Xerxes himself) fell by the hand of assassins. **23. Hanged on a tree**] This punishment was performed by the Persians by crucifying or impaling. Grecian writings and the Behistun inscription frequently mention this kind of execution. The criminal was sometimes first slain, but generally impaled alive. **The book of the chronicles**] Official records, made and kept by the royal scribes, and constituting a body of state papers or annals. See note on Ezra iv. 15; 2 Sam. viii. 17; and Introduction to Kings, on the sources.—*Whedon's Com.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 1.

REGRETS—NATURAL, USELESS, AND WHOLESOME.

Vashti was banished, but she was still a queen, for she reigned in the halls of the monarch's sad memory. The jewelled turban may be placed on the head of another, but a royal soul cannot be stripped of queenly prerogatives by a monarch's power. The king bowed to her greatness, and practically confessed her royalty, though kingly pride and Persian law might prevent a revocation of the edict. He remembered Vashti in fond but sad regrets.

I. Regrets are natural. The sweet vision of Vashti's grace and beauty pleased the fancy of Ahasuerus while it troubled his soul. Her refusal to violate her modesty unconsciously called forth his admiration. And if he had any nobility in his nature, her marvellous daring must have commanded his esteem. How sad the reflection that in an evil and thoughtless moment of undue merriment and boasting he had been the cause of her fall and her banishment! Thus there would be a mixture of gloom and of light, of joy and of sorrow, of fond regrets and of painful upbraidings, as he remembered Vashti. It is natural for us to look back to the past, and indulge in grief over our losses and our follies. Man is a creature looking both before and behind. One sign of his greatness. He recalls the past, and he tries to picture the future. It was, then, natural for Ahasuerus, when his wrath was appeased, to remember Vashti, and what was decreed against her. Natural for all to regret their losses, and especially those that have been the result of their own folly.

II. Regrets and nothing more are useless. Tears will flow, but tears cannot save. They may excite pity, but cannot work out deliverance, nor undo the past. Regrets cannot suck up the water that has been spilt upon the ground. In this instance regrets cannot restore the deposed Vashti. If she knew of the monarch's

remembrance it might afford her some gratification, but this was all the good it would do her. Regrets cannot bring to life the dead which the past has entombed. Let us then so strive to live, to control our passions, that the remembrance of the past may not haunt us with reproaching misdeeds.

III. Regrets and something more may be wholesome. Regrets that issue in repentance are wholesome. It is well to remember the past when by it we are brought to true repentance. It would have been pleasant if we had been permitted to read that Ahasuerus repented as he remembered his folly. Regrets that lead to honest effort are wholesome. Wise is the man who, as he regrets the past, seeks to put forth every effort to repair the wrongs of the past, and be himself a better man for the future. Surely Ahasuerus might have done something more to repair the wrong done to Vashti in spite of the rigour of Persian law. Regrets that prompt the desire for forgiveness are wholesome. If it were not seemly for Ahasuerus to seek forgiveness from Vashti, yet he ought to have sought forgiveness from God. Have we no wrongs that need to be righted? Have we no sins that require forgiveness? We regret our sins when they expose us to temporal evils. Let us regret our sins as committed against God. Let us pray God for Christ's sake to be merciful unto us. He is ready to forgive. Let us learn that self-pleasing is the highway to self-loathing. Our greatest sorrows are often the harvest of the seed our own hands have scattered. Remorse is a bitter cup to drink, and we prepare the repellent ingredients. Memory can be a great tormentor, and the sinner makes the lash with which memory inflicts its painful strokes. And those who injure the just will find that they injure themselves much more. The just may perish, but their memory is ever blessed. The fragrance of correct thinking, of truthful speaking, and of right doing comes from the tombs of the martyrs, and blesses the world. Oh, whatever may come of worldly honours, let men and women be true to principle, and so live that truth-loving men will pleasantly remember their names, and, in a not distant future, even persecutors will assist in decorating their tombs!

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 1.

All that he could do was to indulge in vain regrets; mingled, perhaps, with self-upbraidings. It is the usual penalty of rashness, especially the rashness of temporarily inflamed passion. To bring down the things of court and fashion to every-day life, how many of our police reports, attended with fines and imprisonments, are to be attributed to the very same causes as led to the deposition of Vashti, and the subsequent regrets of the king. When passion is allowed to get the reins of reason, violence is almost sure to follow, and after-reflection to administer the lash of self-censure and remorse. The seat of those domestic feuds and dastard assaults on the weak and defenceless which are brought to light in our criminal courts, and excite our indignation and horror, is just the anger, malice, and reckless speech with which we may be ourselves chargeable. It is not that we should censure them

the less who have been carried into these outward acts of personal injury and brutality, but that we should be incited the more to guard our own hearts. For whether the injustice and cruel wrong be done by kings surrounded by their councillors, and defended by their rank from civil penalties, or by the meanest subjects who are lodged in our jails, the Judge of all the earth deals equitably, and in his final allotments will show that he is no respecter of persons. He brings our feelings and motives and secret passions to the same tribunal as actions, and pronounces sentence accordingly. With the fear of God upon us, let us be jealous of unbridled passion, and stamp out wrath, and we shall be saved from many of those remembrances and regrets which rob life of much happiness. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

O memory! thou art a bitter avenger. Vashti might weep, but Artaxerxes had to repent. In the heat of passion, the one small offence, which had not been of her own making, had bulked so largely in his eyes as to shut out her many excellencies, kindnesses, and devotion; but when passion had subsided, these came prominently into view, and made that one offence seem as a very mote on a ground which was generally good and praiseworthy. But he could now do nothing to remedy the evil which had been done. In this view there is something terrible in the two words which Abraham is represented as addressing to the rich man in the New Testament historical parable, "Son, remember!" Recall the past! Think on the former unrequited, unacknowledged, and abused goodness of God! Think of how thou didst despise the poor, ulcerated, doglicked beggar at thy gate! Ah! these bitter memories of earth will be ingredients in the future cup of the penal suffering of the lost! May God in his mercy deliver us from them all, and give us in their stead the blessed memory of an accepted Saviour, and "a life of faith on the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us!"—*McEwen*.

I. Sin and punishment are inseparable companions. They go together with chains of adamant. Like individual twins, they are born together, live together, are attended the one by the other, as the body by the shadow.

II. When sin is in the saddle then punishment is on the crupper. Isidore, the monk, was one that vaunted he had felt in himself no motive to sin for forty years together. The Hebrews have but one and the same word for both; and blind nature prompted those mariners to demand of the obnoxious prophet Jonah, What evil hast thou done (Jonah i. 7), that the hand of thy God doth follow thee so close? and those barbarians to censure St. Paul for some murder, whom, though he had escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffered not to live (Acts xxviii. 4).—*Trapp*.

1. He thought upon the happy days he had spent in her society.

2. He remembered the proofs of affection she had formerly given.

3. He remembered her punishment. How sad and heavy! Now that his wrath is appeased, and his judgment again balanced, he can see his weakness. The wrong which he thinks he has experienced from her he now sees to be of a very doubtful kind. "He must even confess to himself that, though he had consulted his counsellors, he still had acted in a passionate manner, and given too free a rein to his wrath." This should have taught him to control his passions.

4. He remembered Vashti, but she was now lost to him. Lost for ever as his queen. Lost by his own act. The result of his own passion and wrath. And now the folly of his own act, like a serpent, stings him. Ahasuerus, amid all his wealth and splendour, now feels an oppressive want. He suffered a loss which could not be made good by any other possession, however precious. He may have more wives, and many of them, but they are not Vashti. David may have another son, but not a fair Absalom.

In speaking of the king's sorrow, it should be distinguished from repentance, or godly sorrow. From what we know of the character of Ahasuerus, we may safely conclude that the remorse he felt would be of a selfish character. He was no doubt troubled, but was it—

1. Because of the injustice he had done to a virtuous, yet helpless woman? or 2. Because he felt that he had sinned against the law of right? or 3. Because he had lost his beautiful queen? Doubtless the latter chiefly, if not entirely. It was, therefore, only selfish sorrow. The kind of repentance or sorrow which a thief has when he finds himself in prison, deprived of liberty. He grieves, not because he is a thief, and wrongs his fellows, but because he has lost the chance to steal. Had Ahasuerus not lost Vashti, he would probably have never felt a pang. This feeling is as different as possible from repentance. Real repentance begins in humiliation of heart, and ends in reformation of life; it consists in the heart being broken *for* sin, and *by* sin. If we ever enjoy that peace which comes from God, our repentance must be that which is not to be repented of.

The nature of true repentance is well

set forth in the following outline, by a wise old writer :—

There seems to be an hysterisis in the words, “Repent thee of thy remissness, laziness, lukewarmness, and learn by that thou sufferest to be zealous of good works,” “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Be zealous and repent ; that is, be in earnest and thorough in thy repentance, and each part thereof, contrition, or humiliation, and conversion, or reformation.

1. Know that God will never leave pursuing thee until the traitor’s head be thrown over the wall, till thou humble thyself, and walk with God. As one cloud follows another, until the sun consumes them, so one judgment after another, till godly sorrow dispels them. Let the glory be to him, taking the shame and blame of it ourselves, submitting to anything that he shall see good to inflict. Say, Here I am, let him do to me as seemeth him best. If God will have my life, here it is ; if my goods, here they are ; if my children or any other dear pledge of his former favour, I resign them freely into his hands. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners ; not your hands only, with Pilate, but your hearts also, with David (Ps. li.). Make use of all means, improve all occasions, turn all the streams into this one channel, for the driving of that mill may grind the heart.

2. Our sorrow must be unto a transmutation, or inward change. Our contrition must be joined with conversion, else all is lost ; for this latter is the consummation of the former, and the seal of its sincerity. Here, then, you must set to work again, and be zealous in it. Let your crosses teach you to cast away all your transgressions, to turn from all your wickedness, repent of all your dead works, and put off all the fruits of the flesh. Spare no sin, but least of all thy beloved sin—thy familiar devil ; pitch thy hatred chiefly upon that, fight neither against small nor great in comparison of that ; say of it, as Haman of Mordecai, What avails me anything so long as that liveth ? But that once dead, the rest will soon follow, as all the servants attend the master’s funeral.—*Trapp.*

When the wrath of Ahasuerus was cooled, did he not, think you, envy

persons of a less powerful position than himself ?

Remorse now punished the king almost as severely as his imperious and unjust decree had punished the unhappy queen.

Man is not so wise that his decrees are perfect, and his enactments incapable of improvement.

He ought to have felt grief and shame, that, in his wine and rage, he had so severely punished, and in such an irrevocable manner rejected, so fair and desirable a woman.

Time assuageth the heat of anger, but time does not always fill up the gaps which human wrath makes.

Man has wants which no wealth can meet. There is a want which the best social arrangements cannot supply.

There is a craving in the human heart which no earthly power can satisfy.

Guilty man needs to be placed in a right relation towards God.

“Ahasuerus was as poor as the humblest slave in his dominions in this respect, and far poorer than the poorest of the children of Judah, dispersed through his empire as exiles, but knowing Jehovah.” When the soul can rest on God, as the God of redemption, when it can claim Jesus Christ as its portion, then all outward inequalities of rank and fortune become subordinate ; the Christian possessor of a large inheritance feels that his chief good is in Christ, the poor believer feels that he has a share of the same exhaustless fulness. There is nothing that a man is more ready to keep than his wrath. But Ahasuerus’s against Vashti was after a time assuaged. He remembered Vashti not without some remorse, but without all true repentance. He forsook not his rash anger as a sin, but regretted it for a time, and laid it asleep, to be raked up again on as slight an occasion. In graceless persons vices may be barbed or benumbed, not mastered and mortified. A merchant may part with his goods, and yet not hate them. A man may part with his sins for self-respects, and yet retain his affection for them ; he may remember his Vashti, his bosom sins, from which he seemeth divorced, and, by such a sinful remembering of them, recommit them.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 2—4.

THE SERVILITY OF THE KING'S SERVANTS

It is to be expected that servants should obey, and should seek to study the desires and wishes of those whom they serve. But even servants should exercise discretion, and not sacrifice principle at the shrine of policy. It does not appear that these servants set themselves to consider the claims of principle. Policy was their rule. By policy were they governed, and by policy were they at last undone.

I. These servants studied the king's weakness. But this did not require much study. It was patent to the dullest observer. Those who are constantly about a man may understand the man better than he understands himself. These servants evidently understood the monarch's weakness. Ultimately safe is it for the man to be surrounded by those who can be, and will be, faithful. We may not like faithful men, but at the last we shall find them to serve our highest welfare.

II. These servants pandered to the king's weakness. Base pandering to the sinful weaknesses of men and women has been the bane of every age. It is at work in this enlightened age. While we rightly consider the corruption of a Persian court let us seek to have our eyes open to the corruptions of English society; and faithfully endeavour to stem the torrent of iniquity. Are we still to pursue the system of pandering to the worst passions of our fellows? Are there no faithful ones to be found in modern society?

III. These servants unscrupulously provided for the king's weakness. The barbarous nature of their proposition could not be so evident to them as it is to us who live in these more blessed days. But surely even to them a passing thought might come as to the cruel nature of their proposition. Did they never and for one moment think of the cruelty of the proceeding by which the fairest flowers were to be plucked with ruthless hand from the choicest home-gardens of the land? Did they not consider the woes and tears of mothers and fathers weeping for the loss of the fair young virgins taken to be imprisoned in the king's harem? But self-interest blinds our eyes to the interests of others, and to the claims of truth and of duty. It would be so then, as it is now on too large a scale. Men are still unscrupulous. We bow at the shrines of fashion, of custom, and of wealth. Oh, in these days Mammon is the great monarch, at whose behests fair young virgins are deflowered and strong young men are slaughtered. Mammon is exalted. Humanity is trampled beneath the feet. Mammon is the modern Ahasuerus, at whose commands homes must be decimated and true nobility thrown to the winds.

IV. These servants were for the present successful. Their proposition pleased the king, and measures were carried out for its accomplishment. Yet the success was not according to their wish. True, Vashti was banished and the measures were carried out to prevent her recall; yet those measures tended to the promotion of Esther, who was God's instrument for the salvation of her people, and the destruction of the Lord's enemies. The benefits, then, of a time-serving policy are not of the most lasting nature. If we would reap permanent good we must sow Divine seed. If we would build permanent structures of glory we must use Divine materials.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 2—4

It is said the king's servants suggested this to him. But kings' servants know pretty well what to suggest. No doubt, however, the policy of having another queen-royal had the approbation of the wise men, else it could not have been carried out successfully. And then began the preparation, the

narrative of which needs no illustration of ours. It is perfectly plain: and it is not edifying. And yet *it is*. Rightly read—under due emotions and reflections, it *is* edifying (and especially to the female part of the world), in the highest degree. That *ought* to be edifying which shows much cause for gratitude. Now just look at that picture of Persian female life of the highest kind. Persia—the mistress of civilization at the time: the seat of wealth and splendour: the land of the brave and the wise. And this is how it treats its noblest women! Could female degradation be more complete? All the more complete that none wondered: none protested: none resisted—unless we may take Vashti's rebellion as a kind of moral insurrection against the whole treatment and state of woman. If it was so, it spent itself. For here they come from far and near—the young, the fair, the nobly-born—as well as those of humbler condition in their miserable darkness, thinking that an honour (without a thought of wrong about it), which would now be esteemed, in any Christian country, the deepest disgrace. To use the words of an English bishop on this chapter, “It is,” he says, “of priceless worth, as showing the need under which the human race then lay, of that deliverance which has been wrought by the incarnation of the Son of God, the seed of the woman, who raised womanhood to a high and holy dignity, and by that spiritual espousal of a Church universal, by which he had sanctified marriage, and made it a great mystery. And it may remind the world of the inestimable benefits it owes to Christianity.” Also, one ought to say, that the narrative of this chapter, although we pass it over lightly, is quite purely written. Now this matter ought to be faced, plainly. Sceptics and enemies of the faith are in the habit of alleging or insinuating that there are not a few passages in Holy Writ not fit to be read in families and congregations—hardly in closets. A considerable number of passages certainly are not *suitable* for public reading or exposition. Therefore they are not read; and they are not expounded, except for some

special ends. But impure passages, indelicate corrupting passages? Not one. The breath of God has passed through this chapter, and it is clear and clean, so that no one of simple mind will get harm by reading it. Would any one say the same regarding some of our fashionable novels and tales?—many of them, softly be it spoken, and sorrowfully, and with shame, written by women!!—by women calling themselves Christians, who, at any rate, have received the benefit of the Christian civilization so far, who therefore have been elevated—away beyond heathen female life. And this is the way they behave themselves, and show their gratitude. They spend their energy and their genius, such as it is, in corrupting their fellow-creatures, filling the minds of the young with evil suggestions, which either distress them, or pollute and deprave them: working up disgusting situations, and horrible scenes; making light of the holiest ties of human life, and apologizing for some of its deepest evils and crimes.

I am not speaking at random, although I do not profess to be speaking from any extensive personal knowledge; but on reliable authority, by consensus of judgment of the most impartial description, I believe this matter needs the attention of good people far more urgently than some other things which secure that attention. At any rate, I feel quite sure that I am but doing my duty in thus testifying and warning. One thing we can all do, we can refuse to read. Happily there is enough *good* literature of every kind—not heavy, dull, solemn, but fresh, bright, humorous, pathetic, comic, tragic—all kinds of the really good, by writers both alive and dead. So that there is no excuse for going down into the slough. “Keep thyself pure.”—*Ruleigh*.

Verses 3, 4.—This was an extravagant course. 1. *All the provinces of the kingdom must be searched for fair young virgins.* 2. *Officers were appointed to choose them.* 3. *A house was prepared for them,* and a person appointed to have charge of them, to see that they were well provided for. 4.

No less than twelve months was allowed them for their purification, some of them at least, who were brought out of the country, that they might be very clean and purified. Even those who were the masterpieces of nature must yet have all this help from art to recommend them to a vain and carnal mind. 5. After the king had once taken them to his bed, they were made recluses ever after, except the king pleased at any time to send for them; they were looked upon as secondary wives, were maintained by the king accordingly, and might not marry.—*Matthew Henry.*

A true representation of what we should be without the Gospel.

Without Divine revelation man sinks very low.

Learn how much we are indebted to the Bible for *present* as well as for future happiness.

We enjoy the inestimable advantage of knowing the Lord's will. We are unworthy of it if we follow the promptings and suggestions of our own hearts in order to *please* ourselves.

The first question with us should be, How are we to walk so as to please God?

Nothing is a surer sign of our depravity than to prefer the pleasing of our flesh to the pleasing of him who made us, of him by whom we must be judged at the last day.

If we make it our grand business to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind, we walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.—*Dr. Louson.*

It is not possible that great princes should want soothing up in all their inclinations—in all their actions. Nothing could sound more pleasing to a carnal ear, than that all the fair young virgins, throughout all his dominions, should be gathered into his palace at Shushan for his assay and choice. The decree is soon published; the charge is committed to Hegai, the king's chamberlain, both of their purification and ornaments.—*Bishop Hall.*

The marriages of princes are commonly made by policy and interest, for the enlarging of their dominions and the strengthening of their alliances; but this must be made partly by the

agreeableness of the person to the king's fancy, whether she be rich or poor, noble or ignoble.

What ado was made here to humour the king; as if his power and wealth were given him for no other end but that he might have all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasureableness and exquisitely refined, though at the best they are but dross and dregs in comparison with Divine and spiritual pleasure.

The higher men are advanced in authority, the lower they sink in slavery to their sensual appetites. How low is humanity sunk when such as these are the leading pursuits and highest happiness of men! when every consideration of decency, equity, and conscience, even health, life, and the immortal soul itself, are sacrificed; disappointment and vexation must ensue; and he most wisely consults his enjoyment, even in this present life, who most exactly obeys the precept of the Divine law.—*Scott.*

Verse 2. They knew him to be a sensualist and effeminate; they therefore agree to feed his humour, to drown him again in pleasure, so to drive away his melancholy. Such miserable comforters are carnal physicians; so wretched is our nature, to endure no other physic; so justly doth God fit the physician to the patient, the helve to the hatchet; so do the wicked help each other forward to their deserved destruction. Ahasuerus' counsellors became brokers to his lust, neither is this anything unusual with such.—*Trapp.*

The whole passage affords us displays of human character, the contemplation of which is highly useful; but the chief thing which it is intended to exhibit to us is the wonderful working of God for the accomplishment of his purposes, especially in relation to his Church and his people. The divorce of Vashti was intended to prepare the way for the exaltation of Esther, and she was raised to the kingdom that, by her influence with the king, she might prevent a plot for the extermination of the Jewish race. And how wonderfully was this brought about. None of the agents dreamed of such a thing. It was brought about by means of heathens.—*Dr. Mc Crie.*

In this second chapter we are permitted to see the consequences which resulted from the banquet described in the first chapter. In the present lecture we shall state and enforce one or two general principles. "After these things," etc. (vers. 1—4).

I. We have here to notice the regret of the king for his rash and unwarrantable act. It is very obvious from the narrative, that when he came to himself, and had time to reflect on all that had taken place, he was sensible that he had committed injury; and that he had not only wronged Vashti, but also made himself a sufferer. (1) *He could not devise a remedy.* There are wishes which even the most powerful despots cannot get gratified, and limits to their will which even they cannot pass over. It seemed to be by a simple exercise of supreme authority that Ahasuerus triumphed over the helpless, and had his desire carried into effect. But when he would have retraced his steps, he could not. (2) *The law of the Medes and Persians must stand.* Yet the enactment which did wrong to the innocent queen, at the same time recoiled upon the head of the king himself.

II. But again we have to notice the expedient which his counsellors suggested to free him from his difficulty. Probably he would be moody and harsh toward them, when he saw to what issue their advice had brought him. Despotism, like spoilt children, must be soothed and flattered. He had degraded his queen; but another might be found to occupy the place from which she had been removed. The humour of the king fell in with the suggestion. He consented; it led to the promotion of Esther, a Jewess, to the high dignity of being Queen of Persia. These things are worthy of our attention in the way of practical application. They suggest several lessons. 1. In the first place we may draw from them the lesson, that when men suffer themselves to be carried away by the impulse of any violent passions, they may commit acts which cannot afterwards be remedied, and which they themselves may have especially to lament. We think it is plain from the words, "the king remembered Vashti,

what she had done, and what had been decreed against her," that when he was able to reflect calmly upon the decree which had been issued for the degradation of Vashti, he was conscious that she had been faithful to her place and character, while he himself had forgotten what was due to both. All the past he would gladly have cancelled, but it was beyond his power. His will could work evil, but it could not undo the evil which had been wrought. 2. It forms no excuse for sin committed, that the transgressor had reduced himself to a condition in which he ceased to retain his full consciousness of the distinction between right and wrong. It is with his own consent that he passes the boundary line between reason and folly; and although, in one aspect of the case, he may not be precisely answerable for all his acts when the power of self-government is gone, yet obviously he is to be called to account for reducing himself to that state. Let us take an illustration from the history of Saul. Furnished with the gifts of the Spirit, counselled by Samuel, he might have been a model to the sovereigns who were to come after him. He failed to improve his privileges, the Spirit of the Lord departed, and the evil spirit took possession of him—slew prophets, etc. *He* was held responsible, although the evil spirit prompted him, because he had laid his heart open for the reception of the evil spirit. Just so in all cases. When a man has perpetrated a criminal act, having *wilfully* deprived himself of the power that would have restrained him from it, he has no right to claim immunity from the consequences of his miserable self-will, or to complain that he is unrighteously dealt with when he is visited with punishment. 3. But there is another general application which may be legitimately made of this part of our subject, viz., that repentance may come too late. There is many a cry for mercy raised when the time for the exercise of mercy has passed away. By the law of the Medes and Persians the king found himself in a condition from which he would gladly have been extricated, but could not devise the means. By the unalterable law of heaven

it is ordained that except we repent we must perish. And by the same law it is required that repentance be immediate. "Wherefore, my brethren, take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." But notice—

III. The whole case furnishes such evidence of the power of an overruling Providence, that I would take this opportunity of referring to the subject. The lesson which the text teaches is, in one sentence, this—that, *amid all the workings of human passion and folly, there is a power exercised which brings order out of confusion, and good out of evil.* 1. We present the case briefly as the text brings it before us. Revelry had produced disorder. It had led to most unjust measures towards the queen. The advisers of these measures, finding it necessary to soothe the feelings of their despotic sovereign, recommended to him a certain mode of procedure. The result of this was Esther's advance-

ment. In all this we have a special Providence, overruling the sins of men for the promotion of the interests of the people of God. 2. We see a specimen of the absolute and unrestrained will of man put forth to accomplish ends which had no apparent connection whatever with the will of God, or with what would be pleasing to him. When the curtain which conceals the movements of Providence is withdrawn, we can manifestly trace the connection between the follies and passions of men and the production of important results which they could not have dreamt of. We can perceive the hand of the Lord working where we would not have looked for it, and understand how the very wrath of men is made to praise him. But observe, the sin of the monarch was not one whit diminished because it was overruled for good; but neither is the good to be regarded as evil because it was the undesigned fruit of man's unholy passions.—*Dr. Davidson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 5—7.

A TRULY ROYAL CHARACTER.

The leading part of this history is prophetic. While it records the past it depicts the future. It shows how two of the Jewish nation rose, through the providence of God, to occupy the foremost positions in the Persian kingdom. Mordecai the Jew and Esther his foster-child—two captives—became next in authority and in power to king Ahasuerus. They were great both among the Jews and among the Persians: for the one was queen, and the other was prime minister. The story of their humiliation and after-exaltation is only equalled by the charming narrative of Joseph. And both surpass in interest the inventions of skilful novelists. History and biography repeat themselves. The Hamans have persecuted and planned the destruction of the Mordecais; but the irrepressible genius of the Jewish nation has ever asserted its sovereignty. It is surprising how the Jew from time to time battles successfully against adversity, and makes it minister to prosperity. The Jews have accumulated wealth,—though every barrier has been raised against their success,—and their property has been again and again confiscated by greedy rulers. The Jews have risen to power in spite of restrictive enactments. Their influence is felt to-day to a large extent. The noblest part of our literature is based on Jewish records. They have given to the world its best system of morals. Surely this wondrous people have still a most important part to play in this world's great transactions; and the study of the most obscure among this people cannot be devoid of interest to every intelligent being.

I. Mordecai's royal ancestry. Great importance was attached to genealogical tables by ancient nations. They did not smile at the claims of long descent. Certainly intellectual and moral, as well as physical, qualities are capable of transmission. It is indeed true that some boast of their ancestry who have little else to boast. The Jews were especially particular in their records of genealogy for

territorial, political, and religious reasons. Thus in the Targum of Esther we have Haman's pedigree traced through twenty-one generations to the "impious Esau;" and Mordecai's through forty-two generations to Abraham. In this canonical account Mordecai's pedigree is traced to the tribe of Benjamin. This was one of the smallest tribes, but three names make it prominent. From it sprang Saul, the first king of the Jewish nation; Mordecai, the noble deliverer of his people; and Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles. On the one hand Mordecai was connected with Saul, who was royal by virtue of his office; and on the other hand he was connected with Paul, who was royal by virtue of the nobility of his character. Mordecai himself was of royal ancestry, of royal character, exercising regal functions, "seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." He was a man to do honour to any tribe. It is no wonder that he stands high in Rabbinical estimation, and that mythical stories gather around his person. He is spoken of as being acquainted with seventy languages, and as having lived four hundred years. He is invested with splendid robes, adorned with costly jewels, and placed on the pinnacle of earthly greatness. The courtly heralds with their trumpets proclaim his glory. He was nobler than all. There dwelt within him a patriotic spirit that made him sublime. There was in him a heroic assertion of manhood, which lifted him high above the common people. There was also a wonderful tenderness, which made him the adored of his own nation. He was one of those men that only appear at intervals, that dignify the race, and seem to make sacred *the soil on which they tread*.

II. Mordecai's unattractive name. Proper names are words which serve for marks separating one individual from another. The name Mordecai brings before us the individual and separates him from the person named Haman. The name Mordecai, when viewed as to its meaning, does not raise in our mind the correct thought as to his character. We may consider Mordecai as a word of Chaldean or Persian origin, and as meaning the worshipper of Merodach, the war-god of Babylon. But he was no foolish idolater. If he had been there was no justification for his refusal to bow down before Haman. If he had been he would not have so resolutely adhered to the purpose of delivering the Jews, the worshippers of the true God. He was by moral lineage connected with Abraham, the father of the faithful, the friend of God. The name may be but the reputation, which may be true or false. Character is what the man is. To be noble is better than to be accounted noble. Let men rise superior to names. The word Mordecai has been made to mean the little man. He may have been little physically; and thus the two Benjamites stood in striking contrast. Saul was head and shoulders above his fellows; and Mordecai was perhaps below the average standard. Saul was, however, selfish and mean-spirited; while Mordecai was benevolent and noble-spirited. Saul was craven and cowed before a woman; but Mordecai was bold and daring before the great Haman. Saul abjectly prayed to be honoured before the elders of his people, and before Israel; but Mordecai cared not for his own honour so long as Israel was saved and glorified. If the man is not the mere flesh and bones that constitute the external framework, then Saul was the little man and Mordecai the great man. Manhood is not to be gauged by inches or by ounces; but by thoughts, feelings, and actions. Brutes may be measured and weighed by material appliances; but men should be measured and weighed by moral appliances. The balances of the infinite purities are the tests by which men should be tried. And then what a reversal of estimates. The little becomes great, and the so-called great dwindle down to their true proportions. The Sauls are rejected, as Saul was at last. The Mordecais are honoured, for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. In the Targum of Esther he is said to be called Mordecai, because he was like the pure myrrh. Its taste is bitter and acid, and its smell strong. The taste of this myrrh was bitter and acid to the enemies of God and of goodness; but its smell was sweet to the delivered Jews. As the myrrh is pressed to bring out its fragrance; so the essential sweetness of Mordecai's character was brought out

more fully by the afflictions to which he was subjected. He was crushed not to death, but into a more perfect life and a Diviner fragrance. He was one of those world's great solitary heroes that conquered by his defeats. Ever thus is noble manhood developed. Rough is the school where genius is trained. Sharp is the stroke which touches the soul into Diviner aspects. Keen is the instrument which shapes the spirit into perfect forms of moral beauty. Rude and steep is the pathway along which the traveller struggles up to the heights where the celestial sunlight quivers, and where the soul finds a sphere adequate for its expansion.

III. Mordecai's attractive deed. Mordecai is greatest when he saw his little cousin left a poor orphan, and took her to his house and to his heart, and became to her a second father, so gentle and loving that she no longer mourned the loss of her first father. She delighted to render to Mordecai the allegiance of a true loving daughter. We too often lose sight of the fact that life's little things are really life's great things. We begin with the little and go up to the great. But we do not measure correctly. Our terms are untrue. The great deed was when Mordecai took and brought up Hadassah. The little deed was when he reaped the results of his goodness. For sowing is greater than reaping; but the sowing is done in tears, and the harvest is gathered amid a flourish of trumpets. Men are greatest in their little things. The chariot of Ahasuerus was not checked in its course, the attendant courtiers never condescended to notice, when Mordecai guided to his home the orphaned girl. But he was sowing seed which produced strange and yet glorious fruit. The deed was most attractive. He was true to the claims of relationship and to the dictates of humanity. Without thought of reward, without a knowledge of her future glory, he adopted the child. The orphan's tears touched his heart and evoked his sympathies. How sweetly pathetic the short account, "Whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter." Christianity is better than Judaism. Let it be ever seen that the Christian religion makes its adherents human, tender, considerate. Let us not say, A father to the fatherless is God in his holy habitation, and leave the fatherless to starvation and beggary. Christianity has done much in this direction. Orphan homes are the trophies of the humanizing tendencies. But adoption of the orphan is better than crowding a lot of poor orphans together to be drilled and marched out like young soldiers. Esthers grow best when the Mordecais become their fathers. *Christianity has still much work to do.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5—7.

It is singular that it should have ever been imagined, although it has been by some, that it was Mordecai who had been carried from Jerusalem to Babylon, at the time when Jeconiah, also called Jehoiachim, was dethroned, and led into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. In that case, he must at this time have been considerably more than a hundred years old, which is altogether inconsistent with the part he is represented as performing in this book. It is evidently Kish, his great-grandfather, who lived in Jeconiah's time, and who was carried to Babylon, on which supposition Mordecai would be a man probably in the prime of life at the period referred to in the text. His cousin

Esther, or Hadassah (which was her Jewish name), had been left an orphan. Whether Mordecai had any family of his own we are not informed; but, moved with compassion for her in her desolate and unprotected state, he took her to his house, and brought her up as his own daughter. The maiden was fair and beautiful, it is said—the expressions mean that she was of graceful form and beautiful countenance—and from what is brought out in the history, the endowments of her mind were in harmony with the graces of her person. Sad, however, might the destiny of the lovely orphan have been, but for the kind and tender-hearted Mordecai. If she had been cast upon the world with-

out friends and without a home, the very beauty and accomplishments with which she was so highly gifted might have rendered her only a prey to some of those designing and selfish wretches whose chief object it is to seduce and ruin those who are fair and beautiful as she was. But the eye of the Lord was upon the helpless maiden, to protect and guide her; and Mordecai had her brought to his house as her home. No doubt he felt that he was sufficiently rewarded for his benevolence, in watching over a creature so interesting as Esther must have been—in marking her progress, and receiving the tokens of her confidence and affection. But there were other rewards in store for him, which he dreamt not of, to recompense his work of faith and labour of love. In taking her into his house, and charging himself with the expense of her education and maintenance, he may have been regarded by some of his covetous neighbours, especially if he had a family of his own, as laying himself under a burden which a prudent man would have rather endeavoured to avoid. But he thought not of this. He acted according to the spirit of the Divine law, and the impulses of his own generous heart; and that from which selfishness would have turned away as a burden, he found eventually to be in every respect a precious treasure. A blessing followed him because he had pity upon the orphan.

Now, there are some remarks very obviously suggested by this part of the narrative. I should say that here we have a fine example of the practical power of true religion, in leading to a benevolent regard for the comfort and well-being of the unprotected. It cannot be denied indeed, that specimens of the same kind of benevolence are to be found among the heathen. The ties of kindred have been felt and acknowledged where the light of Divine truth was never enjoyed; and there are on record acts of generosity and self-denial performed by men ignorant of the Bible, which put to shame the selfishness of many who live under the teaching of the Word of God. But there is this difference; that Mordecai, in what he did for Esther, acted only in accordance

with the maxims and spirit of the law which came from heaven—only did what the law positively enjoined, and what, as professing to be subject to it, it became him to do. One manifest purpose of the Mosaic dispensation was, while it separated the seed of Abraham from all other nations, to unite them closely among themselves as brethren. And this purpose it effected to a wonderful extent, notwithstanding the opposition which it had to encounter from the corrupt heart and grovelling propensities of the people among whom it was set up. It is peculiarly interesting to notice, that it was during the captivity, when the Jews were scattered hither and thither throughout the Persian dominions, and when every man might have been supposed to have enough to do in attending to his own interests, and providing for his own family, that Mordecai took charge of his uncle's orphan daughter, and gave her a refuge in his own house. Whatever care and difficulty he had to undergo in supporting himself in the land of exile, he remembered the injunction of the law,—“Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child; if thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry unto me, I will surely hear their cry;” and the prophet's commentary upon it,—“Is not this the fast that I have chosen, that thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”

Now, while it is impossible for us to read what Mordecai did without feeling that his memory deserves to be had in respect, as a man who had imbibed the spirit of the law, and who, amid many temptations to set its injunctions aside, endeavoured to regulate his conduct by its requirements; while we see in him an exemplification of that principle of brotherly love, which the law so earnestly inculcates; let us not forget that the gospel of Christ is designed at once to deepen the feeling of brotherly affection, and to give it a far wider range of operation. If the poor exiled Jew had compassion on his orphan niece, and brought her up as his own daughter,

how sacred should the claims of orphanage be in the view of those who profess to follow him who said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" and, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love each other." The charities of the Jews were confined almost exclusively to those of their own nation. This was indeed a natural consequence of their being isolated from the rest of the world; a result of the particular light in which they were taught to regard the heathen, and in which the heathen in turn regarded them. But "in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free; but all are one in him." Not that the ties of ordinary relationship are weakened by the gospel, and that we are to overlook the special claims of kindred in the enlarged field which it opens up for the exercise of our benevolent affections. By no means. But we are to act toward all men as if they were our neighbours, and toward all who are of the household of faith as brethren. This is the lesson which we learn from our Lord's teaching, and more emphatically still from his example. And it must be confessed, to the honour of Christianity, that one circumstance which distinguishes the countries which have been even only in name brought under its influence, is the provision that has been made in various forms for the distresses of suffering humanity. The institutions for the relief of the diseased, of the destitute, of the fatherless and the orphan, and of the erring who would fain return into the paths of rectitude, are to be regarded as so many evidences of what the gospel has effected for the removal of the temporal evils under which society groans. Different opinions there may well be as to the wisdom of the rules by which some of these institutions are governed, and of the means by which they seek the attainment of their objects; but there can be no dispute as to their benevolent design, or as to the point, that their origin is to be traced up to the diffusion of the knowledge of the

Word of God. At the same time, my friends, I cannot help remarking, that there is something in the conduct of Mordecai, as recorded in the text, and of those who, like him, exercise their benevolence personally in assisting and protecting the helpless, and endeavouring to ameliorate their condition—something that raises it far above that of the people who contribute, however largely and willingly, toward the support of public institutions for the relief of the distressed. It is an easy matter for the wealthy to be charitable, when their gifts, administered by others, involve no sacrifice of time or labour, and no care and anxiety to themselves. But the noblest exercise of charity is exhibited when we take an interest personally in the well-being of the unprotected, and when they can look to us as their friends and counsellors, to whom they can have recourse in their sorrows, and troubles, and difficulties. It may not be that we have opportunity to act literally as Mordecai did, and to give shelter to the orphan in our own homes; but we only act in the spirit of the gospel of Christ, when, according to our means, we make some of the helpless the objects of our special care, and regard them as a trust committed to us by our heavenly Father. The exercise of the kindly affections toward any such carries in it its own reward, and with these labours of love on the part of his people God is well pleased.—*Davidson*.

Mordecai is a lowly descendant of a formerly distinguished, indeed royal, family. He belongs to the scattered foreigners fallen under contempt, who were carried away captives from Jerusalem. He is in a strange land. He has, it appears, neither father nor mother, neither wife nor child. Even his relatives, his uncle and his aunt, are dead. But the latter left an orphan; he is to her a father, she to him a daughter, indeed a precious treasure. Doubtless he is aware how great a trust was left to him in her and with her; how God is justly called the Father of orphans, and that He especially blesses those who pity and minister to them. He knows his duty toward her, and its fulfilment brings to him satisfaction, makes him

happy. God has blessed her with beauty; but what is more, he has bestowed on her an obedient, humble, and unassuming spirit, as is afterwards fully shown by her conduct in the royal house of the women, and as had doubtless been often manifested before. She loves her people, and surely also its customs, laws, and religion. Thus she is to him indeed a *Hadassah*, a *myrtle*, in the true sense of the word, an unpromising and yet promising bud. Indeed, to him she was developed into a lovely flower of hope; and though it happen that she is taken into the royal house of the women, she will still be to him a lovely flower, whose presence he seeks, whose prosperity lies at his heart day by day, whose development will cause him to rejoice. Again, she will more and more become to him a brilliant star, an Esther, in whose light he views his own and his people's future. In this manner his life is not poor, though he appear insignificant and obscure, though it be filled with painful reminiscences and great perplexities, which he must combat daily in his heathen surroundings. On the contrary, he is rich in light and hope; and even if he had realized the latter in a less degree than he eventually did, still his existence would not have been in vain.—*Lange*.

Ver. 5. Mordecai was one of those characters which clearly reveal the hand of Providence.

The light we have of his early life is little better than darkness. But when he appears at Shushan it becomes lustrous as the noontide sun.

He possessed the qualification which fitted him for swaying a sceptre.

Mordecai's ancestors were dead and buried, but family greatness lived with him.

Some men's noble deeds and heroism exist only in name, are hung in picture-galleries, and recorded in the chronicles of their family.

A great name is often carried by a very *little* man. Greatness does not always pass on.

In the person of Richard Cromwell we have not an Oliver Cromwell.

Ver. 6. *Carried away*. Every child of God is where God has placed

him for some purpose. You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus: do not wish anything of the kind, but serve him where you are. If you are sitting at the king's gate there is something for you to do there, and if you were on the queen's throne, there would be something for you to do there: do not ask either to be gatekeeper or queen, but whichever you are serve God therein. Mordecai did well because he acted as Mordecai should.—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

The best may have their share in a common calamity; but God will not fail even then to set his eyes upon them for good. The husbandman cutteth his corn and weed together, but for different purpose. One and the same common calamity proveth, melteth, purifieth the good, damnth, wasteth, destroyeth the evil.—*Trapp*.

It was a good thing for Esther when left an orphan, in a strange land, that Mordecai would become her foster-father.

It was a good thing for Mordecai that he took Esther home and brought her up.

Whilst *giving* he received. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." This Mordecai experienced.

Be careful whom you turn from your door; an angel, in rags, may come there some day.

The adopted child, or even the captive slave, may be God's ministering angel.

That passage, "*The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake*," is very suggestive.

The little maid in Naaman's house became an untold blessing to her master.

Mordecai took Esther, and was well rewarded. 1. By Esther's goodness when with him. 2. By her obedience to him after she had left him.

Mordecai brought up Hadassah, and Esther afterwards *brought up* Mordecai.

She was a poor orphan, but Christ left her not comfortless. He had provided and enabled Mordecai to feed her, to train her up in the fear of God, and to defend her chastity from the fear of lust; beside that, her head was by Him destined to a diadem. Esther the captive shall be Esther the queen; Esther the motherless and fatherless shall be a nursing mother to the Church, and,

meanwhile, meet with a merciful guardian — Mordecai. Why, then, should not we trust God with ourselves and our children?—*Trapp*.

Took for his own daughter. He hid not his eyes from his own flesh, as some unnatural ostrich or sea-monster; he made not, as many do, tuition a broker for private gain; he made not, instead of a daughter, a slave or sponge of his pupil; he devoured her not under pretence of devotion, but freely took her for his child, and bred her in the best manner.—*Trapp*.

There is a resemblance between Esther and Moses.

1. The one was raised up to emancipate Israel from cruel bondage, the other to preserve them from a plot which had for its object their extermination.

2. Moses was taken out of the river, and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Esther was raised to the bed of Ahasuerus and the crown royal.

3. After mentioning the barbarous edict for destroying all their children, Stephen says: "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair"—"fair to God," as it is in the original, according to the Hebrew idiom. It was the beauty of the babe, shining through its tears, that excited the compassion of the Egyptian princess; and it was Esther's beauty which first won the Persian monarch.

4. But the Apostle, referring to the faith of Moses, lets us further into the mystery of Providence: "By faith Moses was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child." Mordecai was to Esther father and mother; and what hinders us to think that he participated in the feelings of the parents of Moses, and that when he first looked on the beauty of the infant orphan, faith combined with natural affection and benevolence in inducing him to take her for his own daughter.—*Dr. M'Crie*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 8—10.

ESTHER'S HOPEFUL BEGINNING.

A good beginning often ensures a good ending. Often, but not always. Buds of promise in this world are sadly and frequently nipped by the untimely blast, or the searching frost. Purposes are broken. Glorious plans are thwarted. Well-conceived structures do not reach completion. However, Esther began well and ended well. She was one of those wondrous beings that make an impression upon all. She carried sunshine everywhere, and all were attracted by the sweet light of her presence.

I. Esther was brought to the king's house along with other maidens. This was not much to the other maidens. To some a gloomy prospect. But to Esther it was one of the steps to a future high position.

II. She impressed the keeper of the women. The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him. On her entrance into what we may call public life she made an impression. She moved along, exerting a charm upon all. Monarch and subject confessed her power, and yielded to her benign sway. All are not alike gifted with this power of pleasing, but all should strive to please others for their good to edification. The more unselfish we become, the more are we likely to please others and to receive kindness.

III. She was advanced to the best place. Hegai preferred her to the best place of the house of the women. Ahasuerus advanced her to the best place in the kingdom. She receives a good place in the pages of sacred history. Let not our strife be for the best of earthly places. That is the best place where the good Lord shows his glory. Let us dwell in the presence of Jesus Christ. Where he dwells is heaven.

The fact that Esther was of Jewish extraction might have militated against her elevation, therefore she preserved a wise reticence. Time is on the side of him who knows how to wait. Mordecai does not enforce either falsehood or deceitfulness,

but simply patience for the period to arrive when truth may be revealed with advantage. An untruth must be scorned; but the man who tells the truth at unseasonable periods, or in a wrong spirit, may do more harm than good. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." The prudent man foreseeth the evil and taketh all lawful methods for its prevention. Christianity teaches foresight. Prudence is commended both by nature and by revelation. But it must not degenerate into cunning. Mordecai was prudent in the management of his household. He trained Esther well, for she did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him. Good training, as a general rule, makes good children. "Train up a child in the way in which he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The well-trained child will not be likely to forget its duty even in the palace. Parents often blame their children for following evil courses; but if such parents closely examined they might find reason to blame themselves. In this age children forget the commandment of their parents long before the palace is reached.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 8—10.

Ver. 9. *Esther was brought.* Poor Esther, who had been so kindly cherished by Mordecai, was now led away from his house to be the slave or the beloved wife of the great king, as his caprice should determine.

1. Her consent was not asked.

2. The consent of Mordecai, her adopted father, was not asked.

3. They were both slaves to a despotic master, and had, therefore, no choice. Blame not Esther, therefore, but pity her, when ye hear that, like so many other maidens, she was led away to the house of the king's women. She was not an actor, but a sufferer. Had she been left to her choice it is probable she would have chosen the poorest Jew that was faithful to his religion for her husband, in preference to the great king.—*Dr. Lawson.*

There is, unquestionably, a difficulty connected with this 8th verse.

1. If Mordecai, of his own accord, presented Esther as a candidate for the royal favour, then he acted in opposition to the law of Moses, which forbade that the daughters of Israel should be given to the heathen. It would be no apology for his conduct that he designed by what he did to advance the interests of his nation. What is forbidden by the law must not be done that good may come of it.

2. Many interpreters suppose that those who were commissioned to select the virgins for the king's seraglio ex-

cuted their office without respect to the feelings of the parties interested. Esther was taken, therefore, without there being any choice left, either to her or Mordecai, in the matter.

3. Others that, as the whole was so manifestly providential, Mordecai may have received special intimation from heaven to bring his orphan cousin under the notice of the king's officers. There is nothing in the history to warrant this opinion; therefore we embrace the first supposition as the most probable account of the affair.

4. But whatever may have been the feelings of Mordecai and Esther, we see the special workings of Providence in her behalf. She obtained favour of the chief of the eunuchs above all the other maidens who had been committed to his care, so that, without solicitation on her part, not only was there more than ordinary indulgence toward her, but she was even treated with a degree of respect that seemed, as it were, the prelude to yet higher advancement. The commencement of Esther's life in the palace gave promise of a prosperous issue.—*Dr. Davidson.*

Ver. 9. *ESTHER'S PREFERMENT.* Who would have thought (a) a Jew, (b) a captive, (c) an orphan, was born to be a queen, an empress! So it proved. *Providence sometimes raiseth up the poor out of the dust to set them among princes.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER II.

Discipline of the passions. The passions may be humoured until they become our master, as a horse may be pampered till he gets the better of his rider; but early discipline will prevent mutiny, and keep the helm in the hands of reason. Properly controlled, the passions may, like a horse with the bit in his mouth, or a ship with the helm in the hand of a skilful mariner, be managed and made useful.

A rich landlord once cruelly oppressed a poor widow. Her son, a little boy of eight years, saw it. He afterwards became a painter, and painted a life likeness of the dark scene. Years afterwards, he placed it where the man saw it. He turned pale, trembled in every joint, and offered any sum to purchase it, that he might put it out of sight. Thus there is an invisible painter drawing on the canvas of the soul a life likeness, reflecting correctly all the passions and actions of our spiritual history on earth. Now and again we should be compelled to look at them, and the folly of our acts will sting us, as it did the landlord, and also Ahasuerus.

Control of anger. Socrates, finding himself in emotion against a slave, said: "I would beat you if I were not angry." Having received a box on the ears, he contented himself by only saying, with a smile, "It is a pity we do not know when to put on the helmet." Socrates, meeting a gentleman of rank in the streets, saluted him; but the gentleman took no notice of it. His friends in company, observing what passed, told the philosopher "That they were so exasperated at the man's incivility, that they had a good mind to resent it." He very calmly replied, "If you met any person in the road in a worse habit of body than yourself, would you think you had reason to be enraged with him on that account? Pray, then, what greater reason can you have for being incensed at a man for a worse habit of mind than any of yourselves?" That was a brave, strong man.

Impressions of sin. The great stone book of nature reveals many records of the past. In the red sandstone there are found, in some places, marks which are clearly the impression of showers of rain, and these are so perfect that it can even be detected in which direction the shower inclined, and from what quarter it proceeded—and this ages ago. Even so sin leaves its track behind it, and God keeps a faithful record of all our sins.—*Biblical Treasury.*

"If you cut a gash in a man's head, you may heal it; but you can never rub out, nor wash out, nor cut out the scar. It may be a witness against you in his corpse; still it may be covered by the coffin, or hidden in the grave; but then it is not till decomposition shall take place, that it shall *entirely* disappear. But, if you smite your soul by sin, you make a scar that will remain; no coffin or grave shall hide it; no fire, not even the eternal flames, shall burn out sin's stains."

Counterfeit repentance. Beware that you make no mistake about the nature of true repent-

ance. The devil knows too well the value of the precious grace not to dress up spurious imitations of it. Wherever there is good coin there will always be bad money.—*Ryle.*

Repentance before pardon. The first physic to recover our souls is not cordials, but corrosives; not an immediate stepping into heaven by a present assurance, but mourning, and lamentations, and a little bewailing of our former transgressions. With Mary Magdalene we must wash Christ's feet with our tears of sorrow, before we may anoint his head with "the oil of gladness."—*Browning.*

In all parts of the East, women are spoken of as being much inferior to men in wisdom; and nearly all their sages have proudly descended on the ignorance of women. In the Hindoo book called the 'Kural,' it is declared, "All women are ignorant." In other works similar remarks are found: "Ignorance is a woman's jewel. The feminine qualities are four—ignorance, fear, shame, and impurity. To a woman disclose not a secret. Talk not to me in that way; it is all female wisdom."—*Roberts.*

Degradation of woman. The farmers of the upper Alps, though by no means wealthy, live like lords in their houses, while the heaviest portion of agricultural labour devolves on the wife. It is no uncommon thing to see a woman yoked to the plough along with an ass, while the husband guides it. A farmer of the upper Alps accounts it an act of politeness to lend his wife to a neighbour who is too much oppressed with work; and the neighbour, in his turn, lends his wife for a few day's work, whenever the favour is requested.—*Perey.*

Radical reform. A small bite from a serpent will affect the whole body. There is no way to calm the sea but by excommunicating Jonah from the ship. If the root be killed, the branches will soon be withered. If the spring be diminished, there is no doubt that the streams will soon fail. When the fuel of corruption is removed, then the fire of affliction is extinguished.—*Secker.*

Individual responsibility. Daniel Webster was once asked, "What is the most important thought you ever entertained?" He replied, after a moment's reflection, "the most important thought I ever had was my individual responsibility to God." There is no royal road, either to wealth or learning. Princes and kings, poor men, peasants, all alike must attend to the wants of their own bodies, and their own minds. No man can eat, drink, or sleep by proxy. No man can get the alphabet learned for him by another. All these are things which everybody must do for himself, or they will not be done at all. Just as it is with the mind and body, so it is with the soul. There are certain things absolutely needful to the soul's health and well-being. Each must repent for himself. Each must apply to Christ for himself. And for himself each must speak to God and pray.—*Ryle.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 11.

MORDECAI'S LOVING SOLICITUDE.

THE histories of Mordecai and Esther are very closely interblended. They run side by side, like the two differently-coloured rivers—the Arve and the Rhone. But the course of one is from time to time being crossed and coloured by the course of the other. Esther played a leading part in the deliverance of the Jewish nation from threatened destruction, but she owed very much to the teaching, the influence, and the wise directions of Mordecai. To Esther belonged the glory of pleading with King Ahasuerus, and securing the rights of the oppressed; but to Mordecai belonged the glory of directing her movements. She was the seen, and he the unseen worker. And these latter often do the most important work, though they are sometimes left to pine away in obscurity. The skilful workman invents and gains little advantage; while the cunning capitalist uses the invention and flourishes. The poor wise man saves the city, but his services are not requited. The thinker creates in secret, and receives small rewards; while the talker uses the thinker's materials, and reaps a harvest of applause and material benefits. However, Mordecai was not unrewarded, for Esther was neither ungrateful nor unmindful of her obligations. These two work and reap together. They sow in tears, in fasting, and in prayers; but they reap in victory, in light, in gladness, and in honour. Let us believe this for our consolation, that work done for God cannot die. Workers in the dark and workers in the light will meet together in the rewarding presence of infinite mercy.

I. Mordecai's loving solicitude. The title by which Mordecai was designated was "the Just." This is a better title than that of earl or noble, of king or prince. What a blessing to a nation when men that are just in the broadest sense of that word direct its affairs, or even dwell near its palace gates! Just men are required to save nations from decline and from final overthrow. Mordecai, however, was no stern embodiment of justice. In him it was tempered by mercy. Kindness was also his characteristic. There was in him a wonderful tenderness which made him adored of his own people. He was true to the claims of relationship, and he adopted Esther as his own child. The orphan's helpless state appealed to his manhood, and he practically said, I will be thy protector. In protecting her he benefited both himself and his whole nation. There is beautiful humanness in the record—"He brought up Hadassah." Mordecai loved the child, and his affection grew as he watched her developing loveliness. And when she was parted from him he followed her with loving solicitude. Space separated, but love united. Mordecai showed the loving anxiety of a true father for an absent child.

II. This loving solicitude was of Divine origin. It is true indeed that all our good is Divine. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." But we may here note a special endowment. God intervenes in human affairs. He makes use of human passions for the promotion of his merciful purposes. And this was part of the Divine plan that Mordecai and Esther should be closely knitted together; for both had important work to do, and for both a great destiny was assigned. Human reasons may be given to account for Mordecai's love for Esther, but there were also Divine reasons. The Divine is ever working in and by the human. One man is attracted to another by an unknown force. That attraction is heaven-imprinted: God's agents are not as solitary as they seem. The reformer is the outcome of the thoughts and feelings of his time, working it may be in secret. Mordecai is essential to Esther. His loving solicitude was a vital force in her wondrous career.

III. This loving solicitude quickened Mordecai's discernment. True love is not blind, as sometimes it is represented. It is a quickener of the discerning faculty. It is sharp to apprehend danger. The mother's ear is quick and her eye is keen to detect the approach of evil to her offspring. Mordecai at once perceived the danger to which Esther was exposed by the new position to which she had been taken. We have good reason for anxiety when our children are lifted to the heights of prosperity. Many sons and daughters have been ruined in palaces who, humanly speaking, would have remained virtuous in cottages.

IV. This loving solicitude taught Mordecai a true creed. Love is light. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in a clear apprehension of Divine truth and of Divine methods. The heart and the head must be clarified by love's indwelling, as well as enlightened by knowledge, if there is to be the possession of sound doctrine. Mordecai might believe in predestination. He might feel assured that his niece or cousin was God's "chosen vessel." But love taught him better than to let the mysteries of Divine decrees interfere with the practical duties of life. "Although he trusted God with his niece, yet he knew that an honest care of her might well stand with faith in God's providence. God must be trusted, but not tempted by the neglect of careful means."—*Trapp*.

V. Thus Mordecai's love made him watchful. How Mordecai came to possess the privilege of walking every day before the court of the women's house—whether he was one of the king's eunuchs, or whether he secured the privilege by purchase—we cannot tell. But there he was, watching with intense interest the maiden's career. The sentinel at his post. The sailor at the helm. So Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house. His love grew by the withdrawal of its object. His anxiety increased as the danger enlarged. We should be watchful for the welfare of others. Mordecai symbolizes the love of the eternal Father. God watches to know how his people do. Esther could not see Mordecai in his daily walks, but he was watching. We cannot see God, but he too is watching. We cannot feel God, but he is protecting. Our vision is not as the Divine vision. Ours cannot pierce the clouds and the darkness which shroud and conceal the infinite. But the Divine vision knows no obstruction. God knows all, and ever watches. Trust ever in the abiding love and continued watchfulness of an unchanging God.

VI. Mordecai's love rendered him self-forgetful. He did not stop to think that his conduct might appear unseemly as he walked every day before the court of the women's house. Love is unconscious of self. It goes out in supreme regard towards the object of attachment. We fancy Mordecai faithful at his post in spite of the frowns of stately courtiers or the ridicule of fawning menials. This speaks of the nobler self-forgetfulness of a mightier love. Even Jesus pleased not himself. He walked every day before the courts of men's and women's hearts, though they rejected his love and despised his beneficent ministry. He still walks. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. At the door of many hearts he is knocking now.

VII. Mordecai's love concerned itself about Esther's highest welfare. It is a suggestive expression—To know the peace of Esther. True peace is not possible where the soul is not in a right condition. There is no peace to the wicked. That love is poor which does not seek the welfare of the whole nature. How many fathers would feel that their children were all right if they saw them only in the outer courts of a palace! But oh, there was danger in the palace of Ahasuerus. And there is danger in the palace even of our gracious queen. Right parental love asks how the child is doing both temporally and spiritually, and what is to become of him or her both in time and in eternity. How are you doing? Are you on the way to the palace of heaven?

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 11.

1. Mordecai was so deeply interested in the fate of Esther, that day after day he was found watching any opportunity that might occur to learn from some eunuchs passing in or out how Esther fared, and what her prospects were. Perhaps there may have been others in similar circumstances with himself, solicitous about their daughters or friends; and if so, his conduct would attract the less notice. But what we have principally to remark is the paternal interest which all along he took in the orphan whom he had reared. She was evidently his chief earthly care; and now, when she was, as it were, taken out of his hand, and no longer dependent upon his bounty and his kindness, he was as much concerned about her as when in her childhood she had sat upon his knee and returned his affectionate embrace. And so parental love is always exhibited. Although the grown-up youth is treated differently from the mere child, and there may be fewer of the words and outward tokens of endearment than there were, the heart of the parent has not become colder; but there are now deep anxieties connected with the progress of the youth, with his settlement in life, and his whole future career, which were not felt before; and though it may not outwardly appear, the most solicitous and intense affection is experienced by the parent at the time when the objects of it are beginning to feel that they can do something for themselves in the world.—*Davidson*.

2. Parents and guardians might take an example from Mordecai. There was danger in the palace of a heathen king, but there is danger also in a great city. Let there be solicitude for those who are exposed to its temptations—the solicitude which leads to watchfulness, and finds its expression in prayer. If there

is the oppression of conscious weakness and separation, the more reason for laying the case before him who can keep “the feet from falling, the eyes from tears, and the soul from death.”—*McEwan*.

3. Mordecai had taken Esther for his child, and was curious of her welfare, though she was now grown up, and preferred at court. The court, he knew, was an ill air for godliness to breathe in. His care was, therefore, that she might have *Gaius's* prosperity, even *mentem sanam in corpore sano*, a sound mind in a sound body. The Turks wonder to see a man walk to and fro, and use to ask such an one what he meaneth? and whether he be out of his way, or out of his wits?—*Trapp*.

Mordecai was so much older than Esther as to make it natural for him to assume toward her the position of a father. What he was in the matter of occupation we can only guess, when we see him take easily to the place of a porter at the palace gate, and when we find him turn as easily to the business of a scribe. But there is no guess-work as to what Mordecai was in the matter of character. He showed “piety at home.” When his uncle died, leaving on the world a fair girl, who, it would seem, had never known a mother's care, he took his cousin for his own daughter, and brought her up. How wisely and piously he did so Esther's conduct will prove. We shall presently see how he proved himself a faithful, sharp-eyed servant, and fearless in the right; and the issue of the story will reveal his heroic public spirit. This Mordecai is altogether an admirable man; of good natural powers, enlarged and applied by religion; wise, sterling, a man who can afford to wait; worth a thousand Ahasueruses.—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 12–14.

THE VANITY OF EARTHLY HOPES.

Here is a vivid description of the means taken to minister to and to gratify the carnal pleasures of a depot. Sensuality is permitted without stint. Manhood is lowered. The animal is rule supreme. Ahasuerus the king is turned into

Ahasuerus the slave—the slave of degrading lusts. Men have not the same opportunities of self-degradation as were provided for this Eastern monarch. But still men may give way to the sensual. Let them avoid the earthly and the sensual, for their climax is the devilish. Now consider the unhappy case of these poor virgins.

I. The great preparation. For twelve months these unhappy victims were being prepared for the great occasion that would most likely occur only once in their lives. Oil of myrrh and sweet odours were at their disposal in abundance. The choicest garments and rarest jewels were in readiness. Female vanity could for once gratify its propensity for outward adornments. Through all time men and women will make great preparation to render the external attractive, while the internal is neglected. Even now women will dress and trick themselves up for a state reception of a few moments' duration. Very few make earnest preparation to dress the soul, and to be ready for heavenly reception.

II. The flattering hopes. Each virgin would doubtless entertain the hope of becoming queen in place of the deposed Vashti. What a delightful prospect! How flattering the hopes that would flutter in each virgin's mind! We please ourselves thus with fond delusive hopes. Well is it for us that hope is so buoyant in this dark world. After all, these flattering hopes are of great service to us in our chequered career.

III. Great preparations wasted. These virgins derived little earthly profit from all their planning and arranging. What a picture this of the wasted preparations in the lives of most! Much money is spent on the boy's education, and just as he reaches manhood death comes and seizes the prey. The lovely maiden droops and dies ere the flower of her beauty is fully blown. The prince is killed by the weapons of savages before he has had time to achieve a name and to lay claim to imperial dignity. The pen falls from the writer's hand just as he is beginning to give permanence to the laboured and matured thoughts of his mind. The world is full of ruins. Wasted preparations strew the ground.

IV. Flattering hopes destroyed. These virgins were sent back into the chambers of the concubines—"the prison of sad and withered hearts." There are many prisons that we do not see. Imprisoned souls endure the saddest punishment. Withered hearts! who shall count them? Flattering hopes destroyed! who shall tell their appalling number? Every life has its own long, dreary list of blasted hopes.

Learn—(a) that *preparation for heavenly service is never wasted*. Perhaps life is not so full of waste as we have supposed. The Divine Builder can turn our very ruins to useful purposes. The preparation that was wasted in one man's life may be of service to another. However, the true way to avoid possible waste is to make this earthly life a preparation for the heavenly. We prepare to enter the court of earthly kings, and are never summoned to the royal presence; but those who prepare in the right spirit and according to the gospel method to enter the court of the King eternal will most assuredly be summoned to stand in that Presence where there is fulness of joy. (b) That *the hopes suggested by the gospel cannot be destroyed*. The hopes of the worldling are too often delusive. The hopes of the hypocrite shall perish. But the hope of the righteous is gladness. To the man who builds by faith on the gospel of God's dear Son there is gladness in anticipation and gladness in fruition. Those who, justified by faith in Christ, and sanctified by the Divine Spirit, entertain the hope of being for ever in heaven, will never be sent back to the prison of sad and withered hearts. (c) If the children of this world make such great preparations for positions they may never be called to occupy, *what preparations should the children of light make to occupy aright the high position to which they will be most certainly called*. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—14.

What strife, what emulation was now amongst all the Persian damsels that either were or thought themselves fair! Every one hopes to be a queen, and sees no reason why any other should be thought more excellent. How happy were we if we could be so ambitious of our espousals to the King of heaven! Every virgin must be six months purified with the oil of myrrh, and six other months perfumed with sweet odours, besides those special receipts that were allowed to each upon their own election. O God, what care, what cost is requisite to that soul which should be addressed a fit bride for thine holy and glorious majesty? When we have scoured ourselves with the most cleansing oil of our repentance, and have perfumed ourselves with thy best graces, and our perfectest obedience, it is the only praise of thy mercy that we may be accepted.—*Bishop Hall.*

No doubt the virgins generally took the opportunity—one that would occur but once in their lives—to load them-

selves with precious ornaments of various kinds—necklaces, bracelets, earrings, anklets, and the like.—*Rawlinson.*

What care and cost is required for the decoration of the soul when it would prepare as an acceptable bride for Jesus.—*Starke.*

Because God desires more and more to have delight in us, and to draw nigh to us, and therefore he more and more goes on to purge us. For though he loves us at first, when full of corruptions, yet he cannot so much delight in us as he would, nor have that communion with us, no more than a husband can with a wife who hath an unsavoury breath or a loathsome disease. They must therefore be purified for his bed, as Esther was for Ahasuerus. "Draw nigh to God," says James, "and he will draw nigh to you;" but then you must "cleans[e] your hands, and purify your hearts," as it follows there; God else hath no delight to draw nigh to you.—*Goodwin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 15, 20.

ESTHER'S ELEVATION.

God in the mysterious nature of his operations puts down the mighty from their seats, and exalts them of low degree. In all the changes of life, in the rise and fall both of nations and of individuals, we shall only be able to walk with calmness as we see the ruling purpose of the Supreme moving on to its accomplishment. Let the history of God's movements in the past be the interpreter of the present, and impart settled faith in the unerring wisdom of the Infinite. The Vashtis may fall, but their fall is the Divine stepping-stone by which the orphaned Esthers rise to greatness in order to be of service to humanity. Written history reveals the working of God; and when the history of the present is written it will declare that God is still working. Let us now read the history of Esther's elevation so as to teach in the present.

I. God's servants patiently wait his time. That Esther was the servant of God is plain from the whole of this history. She was his chosen vessel. Here she waits the Lord's time. She is in no hurry; she manifests the calm of conscious greatness. True greatness has nothing to lose by patience. It may be objected that she was compelled to wait her turn. It may, however, be replied that many are unwise enough to try and fight against the force of Providence, and seek to hurry on Divine movements. Esther did not take this course because she had been taught Divine lessons. She could wait. Blessed are they who know how to wait when waiting is the Divine appointment. Blessed are they also that know

how to move when the turn has come to go in unto the king. Ready to serve both by waiting and by moving is the characteristic of God's servants.

II. God's servants have sustaining confidence. Esther required nothing but what the king's chamberlain appointed. As a wise woman, she would take what was seemly and necessary for her adornment, but, as one conscious of being sent on a Divine mission, she was not bent upon decking herself with gaudy jewels. She let her beauty tell its own thrilling story, and work in its own magical way. The goodness of her soul shone right through her physical form, and rendered her more attractive than if she had worn the most costly garments. She had a sustaining confidence which made her not over-anxious and exacting in her requirements. A sincere effort to serve God will deliver from the evils of over-anxiety. Nature requires little, and grace less. She required nothing but what was appointed. Oh for grace to lessen the number of our requirements, to learn the difficult lesson, in whatsoever state we are therewith to be content.

III. God's servants find favour in unexpected quarters. From a human point of view it was a surprising thing that the king should so suddenly find his love drawn out towards this captive and orphaned Jewess. But more surprising still is the fact that Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. Was green-eyed Jealousy on that occasion conquered? Did none of the on-looking virgins attempt to depreciate her beauty? Did none object to the shape of her nose, the colour of her hair, or the tone of her complexion? Was no whisper heard against this lovely maiden? Women are sharp to find out each other's defects, and yet Esther escaped because she was Divinely fashioned and Divinely guided. She was admired by all because she was God's servant. Hatred is sometimes the penalty of faithfulness in God's service; but if persecuted for Christ's sake we shall receive the favour of heaven, which is better than the favour of earth. However, we may find this, that God raises up for his servants friends in unexpected quarters. Joseph found friends and helpers in the prison. Daniel had lions for his friends and a king for his comforter. Bunyan was trusted by his jailor.

IV. God's servants are royal. The king set the royal crown upon Esther's head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. But Esther needed no earthly insignia to set forth her royalty. She was God's servant, and all his servants are royal. A kingly seed, a royal race are the children of God. She was a queen by virtue of a Divine creation. She was royal by reason of the queenly magnificence of her character. Her virtues were her crown. They shone with brilliancy far surpassing the virtue of pearls or rubies. The crown which Ahasuerus placed on her head will crumble to dust, but the crown of her virtues will never suffer any tarnishing of its lustre. What ambition there is to receive royal crowns from earthly kings! What commotion in the seraglio when the whisper went forth, Esther has received the crown royal! How soldiers will fight, and what hardships officers will endure in order to receive the decorating ribbon or medal from an earthly sovereign! But this is as nothing to the position of those who are to receive the heavenly crown from the hand of the King eternal. Happy day when Jesus shall set the royal crown of his approval upon the heads of his favourites.

V. God's servants are instruments of good. We are not now about to refer to Esther's great life-work in the deliverance of her people from a great danger, but to the facts here stated. In order to celebrate Esther's elevation to the crown, the king made a great feast, called Esther's feast, to all his princes and servants, and granted release to the provinces. This release may be understood either of a remission of labour or a remission of taxes. It is highly probable that it refers to the appointment of a holiday, on which there would be a resting from labour. Finally, the king gave gifts with royal munificence.—*Keil*. When the righteous are exalted the nation has reason to rejoice. Even material benefits result from their elevation. The country owes more to the presence in it of the righteous than it either understands or is prepared to admit. The king's former feast ended disastrously, but we

do not read of any evil resulting from the joyful festivities on this occasion. May we suppose that Esther's presence exerted a salutary and restraining influence? The righteous should be saving forces.

VI. God's servants are fitted for the positions to which they are raised. Esther was gifted with the power of silence, and this is a rare gift. She did not show her kindred nor her people, for the set time had not yet arrived for the announcement. Intoxicated with her success, she might have made an untimely boast of the lowliness of her origin. But she did not, for she was Divinely fitted. She knew both when to speak and when to keep silence. God fashions and educates his servants for the particular spheres they are designed to fill, and for the special duties they are intended to discharge.

VII. God's servants in highest positions do not overlook the minor moralities. It would, we may suppose, have been called a minor immorality had Esther neglected the commandment of Mordecai. She was now a queen, and was she to be in subjection to her uncle? There may be minor and major in moralities, but unfaithfulness in the least leads to unfaithfulness in the greatest. Esther was convinced of Mordecai's wisdom and impressed with a sense of his kindness, and therefore felt that his commandment was binding. We cannot afford, even in highest positions, to be deaf to the voice of wisdom. The commandments of wise old men have in them a Divine force. Those Esthers are Divinely wise who pay respectful attention to the weighty words of the aged Mordecais.

Observe that all Christians are the servants of God, whether the earthly position be high or low. They are royal, whether dwelling in a cottage or reigning in a palace. They should not be over-anxious about the good or great things of this life. Esther required nothing. They should move with quiet faith and restful confidence in their God. They should seek, above all, to fit themselves to be instruments of good to their kind.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 15.

Now when the turn of Esther, &c.—Then, and not till then. So when Joseph was sufficiently humbled, the king sent and loosed him; the ruler of the people let him go free. When David was become weaned from the world, when his heart was not haughty, nor his eyes lofty, then was he advanced to the kingdom. He that believeth maketh not haste. God's time is best; and as he seldom cometh at our time, so he never faileth at his own.—*Trapp.*

She required nothing.—As other maids had done to set out their beauty, but contenting herself with her native comeliness, and that wisdom that made her face to shine, she humbly taketh what Hecai directed her to, and wholly resteth upon the Divine providence.—*Trapp.*

Undazzled by splendour and royalty, the tender virgin rejected all these things. With noble simplicity she took the ornaments, neither selecting nor demanding anything, which the chief chamberlain brought to her. Even after she became

queen above all the wives of the king, her heart still clung, not only with gratitude, but with childlike obedience, to her pious uncle and foster-father, as in the time when he trained her as a little girl.—*Stolberg.*

Let then both men and women learn by this case so to direct all their aims and desires as to please God alone by the ornament of a good conscience, and by the forms of minds well adjusted; but to despise the adventitious bodily ornaments of this world as vain in his sight, and by this piety gain the surer rewards of heaven. For this alone is the true beauty, which is precious in God's view, and which causes us to be approved by the King of kings, and joined to him in spiritual matrimony. . . . Surprising that even the heathen saw and taught this, for Crates says: That is ornament which adorns, but that adorns which makes a woman more adjusted and more modest. For this end neither gold, nor gems, nor purple avails,

but whatever has the import of gravity, modesty, and chastity.—*Feuillant*.

That mind is truly great and noble that is not changed with the highest prosperity. Queen Esther cannot forget her cousin Mordecai; no pomp can make her slight the charge of so dear a kinsman; in all her royalty she casts her eye upon him amongst the throng of beholders; but she must not know him; her obedience keeps her in awe, and will not suffer her to draw him up with her to the participation of her honour. It troubles her not a little to forbear this duty, but she must; it is enough that Mordecai hath commanded her not to be known who or whose she was.—*Hall*.

Nor was Esther behind with her grateful returns. Too many when suddenly exalted forget their former friends, or, what is as bad, forget themselves, become vain and arrogant, and so impatient of admonition and good advice. Children, when they grow up, are apt to think that they are released from all obligation even to their natural parents; they become wise in their own conceits, and spurn advice as if it were an undue assumption of authority. But "Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him." The least signification of his will was a law to her; for she knew that he would require nothing of her inconsistent with her duty to God and her husband. He had enjoined her not to make known her kindred or her people; and this she religiously abstained from, not only when she was under the conduct of Hegai, but after she was seated in the affections of Ahasuerus, and had come to the kingdom. "Esther had not yet showed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her." She, no doubt, felt a strong desire to make the avowal, and to use her interest with the king for the advancement of her kind benefactor. But even this generous feeling she repressed, because it would have led to a transgression of his command. To testify her gratitude she would not disobey him, nor run the risk of displeasing him. And she acted thus, though it does not appear that he acquainted her with his reasons for concealment. We may be sure,

however, that Mordecai did not impose this silence arbitrarily; and his caution confirms the remark already made, that he looked forward to something more important that was to be accomplished by the elevation of his daughter, and waited for the opportune occasion when the disclosure of her people and relationship to him would be the means of advancing it. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning," and "the secret of Jehovah is with them that fear him."—*McCrie*.

There is everything about Esther to engage our interest and sympathy. It is sad enough to find ourselves, even in adult years, suddenly in the front rank through the falling of those who stood in nature before us; but "she had neither father nor mother" while still a child, needing all care. And there were serious aggravations of her orphanhood—her sex, her belonging to the race of exiles, her beauty. But the Lover of little children, the Father of the fatherless, who had said to these captives, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive," had provided for Esther one who proved to her both father and mother. And there are early indications that the orphan girl was a daughter of the Lord Almighty; she obeyed Mordecai, even when beyond his control; and she was modestly free from love of display, a feature scarcely to be expected in a favoured beauty unless she had also grace. At length she became queen consort, and Mordecai's faith had its reward. For we are disposed to think it must have been in faith that he had committed her to the various perils of these twelve months. The parallel between Esther and the child Moses is striking (as McCrie shows in his lectures): each exceeding fair; each raised from lowly station to a place beside the throne; each a deliverer of Israel; each cast upon the waters for a time, although the waters on which Esther was cast were far more perilous than the Nile, and the royal home than the ark of bulrushes; so that we may credit Mordecai with faith like that of Amram and Jochebed. At least it is certain that Esther's advancement, while it came through the beauty which gave

her her name, did not come through that alone or chiefly. God gave "her favour in the sight of all them that looked on her;" her Father sent her to her husband, a poor orphan indeed, but with

that "discretion" without which her comeliness would have been in his judgment "as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout."—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 21, 23.

THE PLOTTERS AND THE COUNTERPLOTTER.

In this passage we have a striking illustration, even in a temporal point of view, of James's statement, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Here in these two plotters—Bigthan and Teresh—are depraved affections and desires bringing forth sinfulness of purpose; it was not their fault that the sinful purpose did not culminate in the sinful deed, and they were guilty. The sinful purpose unchecked on our part renders us criminal in the sight of God, though not always in the sight of man. This sinful purpose brought upon them temporal death. "They were both hanged on a tree." Temporal death is not always the result of sinful purposes. If it were, what a valley of death this world would be. But oh, if we do not repent of sinful purposes, and fly to Jesus Christ, the sinner's refuge, spiritual death will be the inevitable result. The plotters are Bigthan and Teresh. Their design was dark and dastardly, and not to be condoned, because such plots were too common in those days. The counterplotter was Mordecai, who sat at the king's gate.

I. Notice, Their discontentment and his contentment. Profane history throws no light on their circumstances. We cannot tell whether or not they had a true cause for anger. We must simply abide by the statement—two of the king's chamberlains were wroth. Anger may arise from either real or ideal causes. Certainly discontentment is a fruitful source of anger. The discontented man soon finds out reasons why he should be angry. A fancied grievance is quite enough to stir up the nature and rouse the angry passions. If the truth were known, these men had very likely more reason to be pleased with the monarch for their advantages than to be angry on account of some grievance. Mordecai had not much outward reason for satisfaction. He might have reasonably expected more in consequence of Esther's elevation. But he sat with contented heart at the king's gate. He did not complain because he had not been raised to some high position at the court. He sat not as a cringing captive, not with the frown of discontent on his brows; but rejoicing, we may believe, in the elevation of her he loved, sweetly dreaming of her glory, and trying to picture to himself the salutary effect of her moral influence in that heathenish palace.

II. Their discontentment culminates in a murderous purpose. They sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus. He that hateth his brother is a murderer. Anger is a murderer, though the victim escapes with his life. Society cannot punish for unenacted murder. Human governments can only take cognizance in this respect of deeds. The Divine government exercises control in the immaterial world of thought. Thoughts are powers. Unexpressed anger is sinful if encouraged. God will try our thoughts. Who then shall stand?

III. This contentment expressed itself in a faithful discharge of duty. Mordecai did not say, Why should I meddle? what matters it to me what becomes of this *heathen* despot? But he practically said, Here is a great wrong being planned; it is my duty to make known the conspiracy and bring the plotters to judgment. It is required not only of those in high positions, but of those in low positions, that they be found faithful. The men sitting at the king's gate can often do more service to the nation than those sitting in the king's presence. Usefulness is required of

all, wherever found. And oh, the men at the gate of heaven's King should be faithful. Let us cultivate contented and grateful hearts with and for the dispensations of Divine providence, and thus we shall the more likely be faithful servants.

IV. Their folly and his wisdom. Wickedness is always a folly, and goodness is always wisdom. But this must especially strike the observant mind, that the wicked very often bring themselves to punishment by some egregious act of folly on their own part. The murderer in aiming at concealment pursues the very course which makes his detection easy. And these men plotted; but lo, by their folly the plot is discovered. And the thing was known to Mordecai. He took a wise course for the successful defeating of their murderous design. If they plotted cunningly, he counterplotted more skilfully. He did not demand an audience of Ahasuerus. That might have aroused the suspicions of these murderous chamberlains. But he could trust Esther. So he told it unto her, and she certified it unto the king in Mordecai's name. In dealing with the wicked we must be careful. In passing through this world we must be wise as serpents.

V. Their doom and his reward. The matter was investigated by the king, and found out as Mordecai had testified. The two criminals were hanged on a tree, *i. e.* impaled on a stake, a sort of crucifixion.—*Keil.* A speedy end was put to their plotting. Those who plot against earthly kings are sometimes apparently successful; but those who plot against the King of kings shall not always triumph. Their overthrow will be accomplished, and their punishment is ultimately certain. The circumstance was entered in the book of the chronicles, before the king, immediately after sentence had been passed by a court over which the monarch presided. And that was all faithful Mordecai appeared likely to get. No money was given him from the royal purse. No medal was struck in commemoration of his faithfulness. He was not advanced to some post of trust and of influence. His present reward was found in the consciousness of having done his duty. But other rewards followed through the guidance of him who is not unrighteous to forget. God never forgets. Words spoken to help the weak, to cheer the disconsolate, and to guide the perplexed will be remembered. The very tears shed over human woe and sin will have their place in the final adjustment. When the mighty transactions of kings and of warriors have passed into obscurity, when the researches of philosophers and of scientific men have lost their attraction, when the poet's flights have ceased to exert their wizardry, and the musician's strains to thrill, and the painter's canvas is perished like the shrivelled parchment scroll, then will shine forth in heavenly colours, stamped with Divine approval, those works of faith and those words and deeds of love which may now escape the notice of the children of this world.

Learn—(a) That no position of life is free from danger. The one event of death must come sooner or later, both to king and to subject. (b) That faithful subjects are a monarch's true protection. Let monarchs rely not on decrees, not on severity, not on soldiers, but on that love which they have kindled in the breasts of their subjects. (c) That faithful subjects are God-fearing subjects. (d) That kings should seek to surround themselves with God-fearing ministers, and should as certainly and as speedily reward those who do well as they punish the evil-doers. (e) But that well-doing is required in all, whether the world forgets or the world remembers and rewards.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 21, 23.

If the necessity or convenience of his occasions called him to serve, his piety and religion called him to faithfulness in his service. Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, conspire against the life of their sovereign. No greatness can secure from treachery or violence; he that ruled over millions of men, through a hundred and seven and twenty provinces, cannot assure himself from the hand of a villain; he that had the power of other men's lives is in danger of his own. Happy is that man that is once possessed of a crown incorruptible, unfadeable, reserved for him in heaven; no force, no treason can reach thither; there can be no peril of either violence or forfeiture there. The likeliest defence of the person of any prince is the fidelity of his attendants.

Worthy dispositions labour only to deserve well, leaving the care of their remuneration to them whom it concerns; it is fit that God's leisure should be attended in all his designments.—*Bishop Hall*.

Nothing justifies us in assuming that Mordecai reported those conspirators because of selfish reasons, or in order to gain distinction and merit, or because Ahasuerus as the husband of Esther was nearly related to himself. Besides being an indication, it may be an expression of shrewdness, of his sense of duty. Although the Jew as such did not have a very warm feeling of attachment to the Persian king, still, in so far as he lived according to the Divine word, he sought to perform his obligations also toward the heathen governmental authority. Thereby he also becomes a practical illustration of the fact that the piety which is nurtured by God's word is also of benefit to the heathen state and to heathen rulers. The governments of modern times, which treat religion not only with toleration, but also with indifference, should remember that godly fear, as it is useful for all things, is also the most substantial bulwark for the continuance of the state.—*Lange*.

At the time that inquisition was made, Bigthan and Teresh might think them-

selves quite secure. So far as they knew, the dark plot was confined to their own breasts, and as they were both implicated, it was not likely that either of them would divulge their secret. They would continue their duties, and assume an air of indifference. One little circumstance, and another inadvertent speech, and a weapon thrust away into a corner to be ready for use, and a number of small things may have been brought to the surface, and from these a web is woven around the designing conspirators out of which it was impossible to disentangle themselves. "It was found out"—words which remind us of the final disclosure of human hearts. How much has escaped detection by men! How much have they been misled by the mere outward appearances! Thoughts and feelings, intentions and deeds have been shut in to some chamber of the heart into which the light has never been allowed to shine. The subjects of them have never reflected upon them themselves, and have guarded them from the view of others. They may even have passed through life with an unchallenged and apparently saintly character. It is only for a little while. The inquisition of men may be faulty and fail, but the inquisition of God is perfect and unqualified. When he makes inquisition for sin there shall be nothing either conceived or executed that will not be "found out." In prospect of that future revealing of the secrets of our hearts—that unveiling of ourselves to ourselves, and before all men—it is our best policy, as well as essential for our highest peace, that we should now deal honestly, candidly, almost severely, with ourselves, walking humbly and without dissimulation before all men, and earnestly pleading for God's mercy in Christ to cover the multitude of our sins. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."

What reward was given to Mordecai by the king for his prevention of the evil which menaced him! Some commentators have drawn a lesson against

ingratitude, from the circumstance that nothing is reported as having been done for Mordecai. If nothing was done, however, it can hardly be said that nothing was intended. The whole affair was "written in the book of the chronicles before the king"—accurately set down by the scribes who were continually with the king to record all remarkable things which happened in the court, and kept by him for future reference. By and by we shall find that this register was produced, and the events now narrated were recalled to the memory of Ahasuerus, and led to the elevation of Mordecai. The reward tarried, but still it came. Men may be unmindful, but God never. And the manner in which this pious Jew was ultimately rewarded ought rather to incite us to look away from the human to the Divine, and put greater trust in the leading and recompense of God.—*McEwan.*

The narrative before us teaches, that whatever station in providence men are called to fill, they may be instrumental in conferring important benefits on others. Mordecai, a man of humble rank, exercising compassion and benevolence, trained up the orphan girl who became queen of Persia, and through whose instrumentality vast benefits were conferred on the Jews. Mordecai, who sat in the king's gate, saved the life of the king. And many incidents there are, recorded both in ancient and modern history, which illustrate the truth that in human society the several classes are so dependent on one another, that the highest may be made debtor to the lowest, and that the humblest may render services to those above them which cannot be adequately repaid. Such fidelity as Mordecai exhibited has often been exemplified.—*Davidson.*

For Esther did the commandment of Mordecai.—Her honours had not altered her manners; she was as observant of Mordecai still as ever. So was Joseph, David, Solomon, Epaminondas, and others of their old and poorer parents. Pope Benedict, a Lombard, a shepherd's son, would not acknowledge his poor mother when she came to him lady-like, but caused her to put on her shepherdess

apparel, and then did her all the honour that might be. Sir Thomas More would in Westminster Hall beg his father's blessing on his knees. Mordecai was Esther's foster-father, and had given her, though not her being, yet her well-being; and hence she so respects him, and is so ruled by him. She had gotten from him that nurture and admonition in the Lord that was better to her than the crown of the kingdom; for what is unsanctified greatness but eminent dishonour? If any parents find disobedient children, let them consider whether, Eli-like, they have not honoured (I mean cockered) their sons too much, which is the reason they honour them so little now.

In those days.—While this voluptuous prince was in the glut of carnal delights his life is sought for; so slippery places are great ones set in; so doth the Lord sauce their greatest prosperity with sudden and unexpected dangers. Thus Attilas, king of the Huns, was hanged up in gibbets, as it were, by God's own hands in the midst of his nuptials.

Some great princes have wished never to have meddled with government; as Augustus, Adrian, Pertinax, who used to say that he never in all his life committed the like fault as when he accepted the empire; and many times he motioned to leave the same, and to return unto his house. Dioclesian and Maximian did so; for they found that *quot servi, tot hostes; quot custodes, tot carnifices*; they could not be safe from their own servants; but, Damocles-like, they sat at meat with a drawn sword hanging by a twined thread over their necks. Hence Dionysius durst not trust his own daughter to barb him. And Massinissa, king of Numidia, committed his safe-keeping to a guard of dogs; for men he durst not trust.

And the thing was known to Mordecai.—How he came to know it is uncertain. Josephus saith that it was revealed to him by one Barnabazus, a Jew, who was servant to one of the conspirators. R. Solomon saith that the eunuchs talked of the plot before Mordecai in the language of Tarsus, supposing that he had not understood them, and so it

came forth. Others conceive that they solicited him, being one of the keepers of the king's door, also to join with them. Howsoever it was that he got inkling and intelligence of their bloody purpose, God was in it, and good men are of his privy council. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."—*Trapp*.

Besides flatterers, despots are apt to have traitors and assassins about them, such as Bigthan and Teresh. Mordecai detected their villany, and no doubt ran considerable risk in exposing it. But he was not one of those who are honest only when honesty appears to them to be the best policy; he did the right because it was the right, faithfully and fearlessly. Therefore he would not be disappointed when weeks and months went by without the selfish king taking

notice of the important service he had rendered him. He probably did not know that it "was written in the book of the chronicles before the king," for it was Esther who saw to that. There was another book of remembrance, "by seraphs writ," before One who may "hide himself," but who never forgets. "The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Soon, following this story, we shall "return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Ver. 11. *God's kindness.* No doubt, said the Rev. John Brown of Haddington, I have met with trials as well as others, yet so kind has God been to me, that I think, if he were to give me as many years as I have already lived in the world, I should not desire one single circumstance in my lot changed, except that I wish I had less sin. As Mordecai watched over Esther, so God watches to know how his people do. The meaning of all God's dispensations, the extent of his kindness, and the unwearied nature of his watching we shall not know till we stand in the revealing light of eternity. Oh, to believe that God's ways are best—that the storm as well as the calm, the rough as well as the smooth, the painful as well as the pleasant are indications of God's kindness.

Ver. 11. *A mother's glory.* A boy, hearing a visitor of his father make use of the familiar saying that "an honest man is the noblest work of God," made this innocent annotation upon it: "No, sir, my mamma is the noblest work of God." Let parents be as lovingly anxious for the welfare of their children as Mordecai was for Esther's; let them by judicious treatment, by wise and loving example, and by constant prayer lead them up into the beauty of holiness, and thus their memories will be blessed, and their names held in affectionate esteem. Some parents complain of a want of obedience and of reverence on the part of their children, who might with more reason complain of their own folly in not insisting upon obedience from the very first, and in not conducting themselves so as to command reverence and affection.

Ver. 15. *Virtue the true adorning.* Plutarch speaks of a Spartan woman, that when her neigh-

hours were showing their apparel and jewels, she brought out her children, virtuous and well taught, saying, These are my ornaments and accoutrements. Esther did the like with her virtues, which drew all hearts unto her; like as fair flowers in the spring do the passenger's eyes. She had decked herself with the white of simplicity, with the red of modesty, with the silk of piety, with the satin of sanctity, and with the purple of chastity; and being thus adorned and beautified, women shall have God himself to be their suitor, and all godly men their admirers.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 15. *Dress.* A woman's dress should always be modest, never arrest attention, or suggest the unchaste. "Madam," says old John Newton, "so dress and so conduct yourself that persons who have been in your company shall not recollect what you had on." A fashionably-dressed lady once asked a clergyman if there was any harm in wearing feathers and ornaments. He answered, "If you have the ridiculous vanity in your heart to wish to be thought pretty and fine, you may as well hang out the sign." Dress should be not only modest, but becoming—becoming to the stature, gait, complexion, and station of the wearer.—*The Practical Philosopher*.

Ver. 15. *Silken garments fresh.* Troya relates that Francesca and her paramour Paolo were buried together after their slaughter by Francesca's enraged husband; and that three centuries after the bodies were found at Rimini, whither they had been removed from Pesaro, with the silken garments yet fresh. But even such garments as those shall decay. They cannot resist the withering hand of old Time. All that is material must perish. But the silken garment of virtue shall be ever fresh. It will last not

merely for three centuries, but for the cycles of eternity. Fresh and beautiful for ever is this glorious garment.

Ver. 15. *Clay made fragrant by the rose.* A traveller in passing through the country in Persia chanced to take into his hand a piece of clay which lay by the wayside, and to his surprise he found it to exhale a most delightful fragrance. Thou art but a poor piece of clay, said he; an unsightly, unattractive, poor piece of clay! How fragrant thou art! I admire thee, I love thee; thou shalt be my companion; I will carry thee in my bosom. But whence hast thou this fragrance? The clay replied, I have been dwelling with the rose. Esther was not an unsightly, unattractive piece of clay; but her fragrance came not from her physical beauty, but from the fact that in her dwelt the rose of goodness. The clay of a well-shaped physical form has a certain attractiveness, but it is only rendered perfect as it enshrines and is beautified by the sweet flower of virtue. The fragrance of a holy life is far-reaching, ever attractive, and ever enduring.

Ver. 20. *Silence a virtue.* Taciturnity is sometimes a virtue, and Tacitus the best historian. Queen Elizabeth's motto was, *Video, taceo*—I see, and say nothing. Sophocles saith, nothing better becometh a woman than silence. Euripides also saith that silence, and modesty, and keeping at home are the greatest commendation to a woman that can be. Curtius tells us that the Persians never trust one whom they find to be talkative. Some know when to speak and when to keep silent, but do not act up to their knowledge. Esther had the knowledge and the grace to conduct herself according to the requirements of her condition.

"Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment."—*Polonius*.

Ver. 23. *Duty its own reward.* On the coast of Wales a vessel was being wrecked, and the life-boat men pushed out to the rescue. Again and again they braved the storm, and drove on through the surging billows, in order to save human life. When the work was completed, and the last man brought on shore, they were asked what reward could be given. And their noble reply was, that they wanted no payment, their reward was that they had succeeded in saving the shipwrecked from a watery grave. Mordecai found his reward in the consciousness of having done his duty. An approving conscience is better than the wealth of monarchs. Earthly books of chronicles may bury while they record our good deeds, but the noble worker looks above and beyond the plaudits of time.

Ver. 23. *Earth's heroes unknown.* Before men went out to the last American war, the orators told them that they would all be remembered by their country, and their names be commemorated in poetry and in song; but go to the graveyard in Richmond, and you will find there six thousand graves, over each one of which is the inscription "Unknown." The world does not remember its heroes; but there will be no unrecognized Christian worker in heaven. Each one known by all, grandly known, known by acclamation; all the past story of work for God gleaming in cheek, and brow, and foot, and palm. They shall shine as distinct stars for ever and ever.—*Talmage*.

Ver. 10. *True greatness.* Augustine says "that God is great in great things, but greatest in little things." And if we would form a true estimate of men, we must measure them not by their great things, but by their little things. Mordecai was greatest not when he was great in the king's house, but when he adopted his little cousin, and was faithful when sitting at the king's gate. A new arithmetic is required in social computations. Life's littles are really and often life's greats. Men are greatest in their little things. We do not need martyr stakes, nor battle-fields, nor any public scenery to show us the good and true man. His little acts, his daily conduct will furnish tests. One flash reveals the diamond.

Ver. 23. *Latimer and Bonner.* Bishop Latimer, when examined before Bonner, at first answered without much thought and care. But presently a startling sound falls on his ear. It is only the scratching of a pen on paper behind the curtain. Why should the bishop stop? Why should his face grow pale and his frame tremble? By means of that pen his words were being taken down to be used against him. "Suppose you knew that a register was kept by some invisible scribe of all that you think, or speak, or act; what manner of persons would you endeavour to be in the exercise of every virtue? Know, then, that none of your actions ever can be forgotten, that even your most secret thoughts are written in durable registers. The Lord hearkens and hears all that is spoken by us. He observes all that we think or do, and a book of remembrance is written before him, which will one day be opened, to the praise of them that do well, and to the confusion of the wicked. Mordecai was not presently rewarded by the king for the eminent service which he had done him. No matter; it was marked down in the king's register. If he had never been rewarded by the king, the testimony of his conscience and the assurance of Divine approbation were more to him than all that the king could bestow."—*Lawson*.

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. *After these things*] After the events related in the former chapter. The twelfth year of the reign of Ahasuerus, five years after ch. ii. 16, but here somewhat sooner. "The name *Haman* is probably the same which is found in the classical writers under the form of Omanes, and which in ancient Persian would have been Umana or Umanish, an exact equivalent of the Greek Eumenes. Hammedatha is perhaps the same as Madata or Mahadata (Madates of Q. Curtius), an old Persian name signifying "given by (or to) the moon."—*Rawlinson*. The term *Agag* means "the fiery," and may have been applied to persons without any reference to nationality. It was employed as a general name of dignity by the kings of Amalek. Impossible to determine Haman's nationality. We may perhaps conclude that the epithet "Agagite" is here used symbolically of a heathen enemy of the Jews. 2. *Bowed*] A simple inclination of the body as to an equal in courtesy; but *reverenced*] a complete prostration in Oriental style of homage to a superior. A kind of religious homage. Mordecai's confession that he was a Jew appears to imply that the rules of his religion would not allow him to offer the semblance of Divine honours to a mortal. Mordecai is represented in the apocryphal Esther as praying: "Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride that I did not bow to Haman; for I would have been glad for the salvation of Israel to kiss the soles of his feet. But I did this that I might not glorify man more than God; neither would I worship any, O God, but thee." 4. *Whether Mordecai's matters would stand*] Whether the religious scruples of a Jew would be tolerated in opposition to Persian laws and customs. 6. *He thought scorn*] Literally, it was contemptible in his eyes. 7.] The first month Nisan corresponds nearly with our April. The twelfth month Adar with our March. An interval of eleven months. מָרְדֳּכַי is an old Persian word meaning lot (*sorts*). The words "from day to day, from month to the twelfth month," must not be understood to say that lots were cast day by day, and month by month till the twelfth; but that in the first month lots were at once cast, one after the other, for all the days and months of the year, that a favourable day might be obtained. We do not know the manner in which this was done, "the way of casting lots being unknown to us."—*Keil*. But *Rawlinson* says *Par* is supposed to be an old Persian word etymologically connected with the Latin *pars*, and signifying part or lot. In modern Persian *parsh* has that meaning. The recovered fragments of the old language have not, however, yielded any similar root, מָרְדֳּכַי may be regarded as an impersonal verb, and refers to some one whose office it was to cast lots. 8.] The Jews were at this time a people scattered abroad. From the fall of Samaria the tribes of Israel had become more and more dispersed among the people in all the provinces of the East, until their tribe divisions could be now but faintly recognized. Seneca says, "Such power have the customs of this detestable people already gained, that they are introduced into all lands; they the conquered have given laws to their conquerors." 9.] Ten thousand talents of silver, reckoned according to the Mosaic shekel, are £3,750,000; according to the civil shekel, £1,875,000.—*Keil*. 10.] The signets of Persian monarchs were sometimes rings, sometimes cylinders, the latter probably suspended by a string round the wrist. The expression here used might apply to either kind of signet.—*Rawlinson*. The signet cylinder of Darius Hystaspes bears a trilingual inscription which reads, "Darius the great king," and also a picture of the king hunting lions in a palm grove. 11.] Some understand this to mean that Ahasuerus refused the silver which Haman had offered to him; but the passage is better explained as a grant to him of all the property of such Jews as should be executed. In the East confiscation follows necessarily upon public execution, the goods of criminals escheating to the crown, which does with them as it chooses.—*Rawlinson*. 12.] The scribes of Xerxes are mentioned more than once by Herodotus. They appear to have been in constant attendance on the monarch, ready to indite his edicts, or to note down any occurrences which he desired to have recorded.—*Rawlinson*. מְשִׁנֵּי and פְּרָוִת are here placed together, the satraps of the larger provinces and the rulers among the separate peoples of the provinces. The מְשִׁנֵּי are the native so-called born princes of the different people. 13.] By the runners, by whom they were sent, are meant the posts, the angari or pressmen, who were posted on the main roads of the empire at definite distances from each other, from four to seven parasangs, and who rapidly expedited the royal (mails) letters or commands. The three verbs—to destroy, to kill, and cause to perish—are combined to give strength to the expression. מְשִׁנֵּי is their property, which is called spoil because it was delivered up to plunder. 14.] By the issue of the decree at this time (the first month) the Jews throughout the empire had from nine to eleven months' warning of the peril which threatened them. So long a notice is thought to be "incredible," and the question is asked, Why did they not then quit the kingdom? In reply we may say, (1) That many of them may have quitted the kingdom; and, (2) That those who remained may have believed, with Mordecai, that enlargement and deliverance would arise from some quarter or other. As to its being improbable that Haman should give such long notice, we may remark that Haman only wished to be quit of Mordecai, and that the flight of the

Jews would have served his purpose quite as well as their massacre.—*Rawlinson*. 15.] וְהָיָה primarily does not mean that it was *distressed* by terror or sorrow, but that it was *perplexed*, did not know what to think of such a terrible command. The remark that “Shushan was perplexed” has been attributed to Jewish conceit, but without reason. Susa was now the capital of Persia, and the main residence of Persians of high rank. These, being attached to the religion of Zoroaster, would naturally sympathize with the Jews, and be disturbed at their threatened destruction. Nay, even apart from this bond of union, the decree was sufficiently strange and ominous to “perplex” thoughtful citizens.—*Rawlinson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES I, 6.

THE PROSPEROUS WICKED MAN.

MATTHEW HENRY says, “I wonder what the king saw in Haman that was commendable or meritorious; it is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud, and passionate, and revengeful; yet was he promoted and caressed, and there was none so great as he. Princes’ darlings are not always worthies.”

I. The wicked man in great prosperity. History, both of nations and of individuals, repeats itself. Both in ancient and in modern times we may see the wicked in great prosperity. Haman is typical. The race is prolific. Haman is the progenitor of a long line that by skilful plotting rise above the heads of superior men. If earthly greatness be a reward, the good are not always rewarded in time. In this world rewards are not rightly administered. Push and tact get the prize. Modest talent may be commended in the song or in the oration, but may be thankful if it does not find itself compelled to enter the workhouse. Goodness in purple and fine linen is commended; but goodness personified in a certain beggar named Lazarus is not an article of modern creeds. We are still too prone to believe that Virtue fares sumptuously every day, and that only Vice is fed with crumbs and has its sores licked by the dogs.

II. The prosperous wicked man is surrounded by fawning sycophants. “All the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him.” But a king’s commandment is not required to secure outward homage towards those in high places. There is always a sycophantic crew ready to worship earthly greatness. Clothe a man with the outward marks of royal favour, and many are at once prepared to become his blind adulators. Christian England has not improved very much on heathenish Persia. Outward show attracts more admirers than inward worth. Imperialism is glorified in political, literary, and ecclesiastical spheres. Greatness, not goodness, is still a leading virtue in ethical systems. Prowess in arms, push in business, skill in politics, success in literature, and parade in religion are the articles of the creed in which modern society devoutly believes. The wicked Haman so long as he is prime minister must be revered.

III. The prosperous wicked man is surrounded by meddling sycophants. Even admirers may be too officious. If Haman had known and seen all he might have prayed, Save me from my friends. The king’s servants told Haman that there was a Jew who would not reverence enthroned and bedazzled wickedness. No, they would have told him this had they told him the truth; they might have told him this had they seen Mordecai’s nobility. However, their selfish zeal carried them too far. They were undermining Haman’s grand position, and frustrating their own purposes of aggrandisement. How often it is that in trying to grasp too much we lose all!

IV. The prosperous wicked man finds that false greatness brings trouble. That greatness is false which is not the outcome of goodness. The course of wicked prosperity cannot run smooth. Haman meets with the checking and detecting

Mordecai. Ahab is troubled by Elijah. Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man. Herod beheads John the Baptist, but still he is not free from a reproving spirit. When Mordecai refuses to bow let Haman tremble. We do not attempt to prosecute the difficult inquiry what it was which led Mordecai to refuse to bow to Haman. Much has been said and written, but no satisfactory conclusion has been reached. All that we can say is, that there must have been a strong religious motive working in the mind of Mordecai which induced him to pursue a course which exposed him to the wrath of an Eastern despot. The nobility, the heroism of Mordecai must be admired as he thus braved death itself, and refused to follow the multitude in doing evil. Oh, for more Mordecais; for those who shall dare to be singular; for those who will stand by their convictions. Let great men watch how men of strong convictions deport themselves. There is more wholesome teaching in the silent mood of the strong-minded than in the honeyed words of shallow sycophants.

V. The prosperous wicked man may learn that an unrestrained nature brings trouble. Haman was intoxicated with his greatness, and could not brook it that one poor Jew refused an outward act of homage. Haman was full of wrath, and consequently was full of trouble. Wrath is cruel, both to the subject and the object. A dark cloud gathers on Haman's countenance, for wrath drives away the cheering sunlight, and brings darkness over the whole man. One whispered hiss reaching the great man's ear is sufficient to drown the hosannas of the multitude.

VI. The prosperous wicked man unwittingly plots his own downfall. Haman's wrath led him to dangerous extremes. He vainly fancied that nothing could withstand his greatness; so he determines to take signal vengeance on Mordecai by making his whole nation suffer. It was not sufficient for this great man to touch Mordecai only. He would not demean himself by laying hands on that one dog of a Jew. He must have wholesale slaughter. Wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. Poor Haman! Already we see thee treading on a volcano. Thy hands are digging the pit into which thou shalt fall. Thy minions are already preparing the gallows on which thou thyself shalt be hung.

(a) *Prosperity has its drawbacks.* This is true of all prosperity, but more especially of the prosperity of the wicked. The triumphing of the wicked shall be short. Greatness purchased by the sacrifice of goodness must bring trouble to its possessor sooner or later. (b) "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." Haman and his flatterers were dividing the spoil, but they were not happy. Mordecai was of a humble spirit, and enjoyed peace of mind. (c) That our greatest troubles often spring from our own depraved natures. Haman's depravity worked him misery and ruin in the end.

"Heaven is most just, and of our pleasant vices
Makes instruments to scourge us."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1, 6.

We have the picture given us, and are called to study it, of a thoroughly bad man, one of his seed who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.* The greater number of bad men have some redeeming feature in their characters to which we are glad to turn for relief; but you look in vain for any redeeming feature in Haman. He was

vain, false, selfish, and not merely cruel in the thoughtless way that all selfish persons are cruel, but vindictive and black-hearted. All was going well with this man. His rivals had been crushed, his seat had been set above the seats of all the noblemen at court, the king had made him his boon companion, and had issued orders that the palace servants should bow before him and do him

* John viii. 44.

reverence. He was as nearly happy as a man can be whose ruling passion is vanity; but such men hold their happiness by a very frail tenure. It does not look altogether well that Abasuerus should have needed to give special orders about his servants bowing to Haman. Darius had not needed to do this in the case of Daniel. Had the favourite been respected and liked, men would have given him all seemly honour unbidden. But this was a very different case. Daniel carried that within himself which secured his peace, even when suddenly flung down from lofty station to the lions' den; but this little-great man was made miserable by discovering that there was a single porter who did not prostrate himself before him. "But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." It does seem a very small matter, but when such a man as Mordecai attached importance to it, we must pause and consider whether the matter was really so small as it seemed. For it is an unsafe way of reasoning to say about anything, It is only one little act; why scruple over it? If it does no good, it can do no harm; and so forth. By such reasoning habits of untruth and intemperance have many a time been formed, and what was perhaps little in itself, if it had been possible to separate it from all else, has been found to be anything but little in its results. The truth is, we cannot separate any single action from the rest of our lives, so that the importance of an action depends not on its greatness or its littleness, but on many other circumstances, such as, how often we do it, the effect it has on others, particularly its influence on our own consciences. In this case it so happened that what Mordecai did—rather what he determined not to do—proved to be of very great importance to the whole Persian empire; but he could not know that. What he did know was, that if he had once bowed to Haman his conscience would have been defiled, as surely as Daniel's would have been if he had eaten the king's meat; and a polluted conscience is no trifle. A man has to carry it about with him all day, to go to sleep with it if he can, to encounter it again when he awakes, until

God purges out the stain. — *A. M. Springton, B.A.*

True religion does not interfere with the ordinary courtesies of life, nor does it forbid our rendering that honour to rank and station which is their due. But when vice and real infamy are shrouded under high rank, the Christian must beware of acting so as to make it supposed that the rank forms an apology for the vice and infamy, or renders them less hateful than they really are.

It is to be regarded as a kind of retribution, in the case of ungodly and wicked men, that the very irregularity and violence of their passions contains in itself what is sufficient to embitter the whole cup of their enjoyment. This is matter of universal experience. In the instance before us, it is very plain that Mordecai's unbending and contemptuous attitude rendered Haman altogether indifferent to the homage which was rendered to him by others. Formerly he had retired from his attendance upon the king, through the crowd of obsequious and prostrate slaves, with the highest desires of his heart gratified. His greatness was acknowledged. His will was law. There was no man in the kingdom, next to the sovereign himself, to whom such incense was offered by all. He had reached a higher elevation than the greatest nobles of the kingdom occupied. Unbounded power and wealth were within his grasp, and what more could he wish for? But now one incident, in itself so trifling that we wonder it could have even occasioned him pain for a moment, strips his grandeur and power of all their charms. Mordecai will not bow to him, nor do him reverence. The slavish homage of thousands ceases to gratify him because this one man—a Jew—will not recognize his greatness, nor honour him. His feeling is brought out afterwards very graphically in the history when, after recounting to his family and friends all the dignities and advantages which, through the favour of the king, he enjoyed, he says, "All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

The wicked always receive part of

their punishment in the violence of some unhallowed passion which blinds them to all the real benefits of their lot. Is there not a gnawing disease in the heart of the covetous man, for example, which prevents him from enjoying the good things which are placed within his reach, just because he has not yet acquired all that he wishes to possess? And still, as he gets more and more, is he not as far as ever from being satisfied, since he has not yet reached the point at which he aims? Or, again, look to the man who is the slave of envy, and mark how miserable this base passion makes him. He has ample means of enjoyment which he can call his own, but his neighbour has something which pleases him better, and just because that one thing is wanting to himself, he can find no satisfaction in the varied blessings which a kind Providence has showered upon him. His neighbour's good is to him what Mordecai at the king's gate was to Haman. In like manner, I might advert to the working of the more violent passions of anger and revenge, as a cause of intense torment to those who cherish them, and as altogether preventing them from taking advantage of many sources of happiness which lie open to them on every side. I might also allude to the misery which wounded vanity and affronted pride often bring to those who have high notions of their own importance, as when a trifling word or action will discompose them for many days together, and deprive them of their relish for the things that formerly pleased and made them happy. But enough has been said to show how by a just retribution the ungodly, following out their natural tendencies and passions, work out their own punishment. How different is the picture presented to us where grace reigns in the heart. Although corruption is not altogether eradicated from the spiritual man, yet its power is subdued; the fierce passions are tamed; love takes the place of envy, malignity, and wrath; and the believer, seeking and finding his chief enjoyment in God, remains comparatively unruffled by those incidents which breed so much vexation and disquietude in the breast of the

ungodly. The wise man says that "he who is of a merry heart hath a continual feast;" and emphatically it may be said that the heart in which the Spirit of God dwells is a peaceful sanctuary—the seat of pure enjoyment.

Satan is always ready to take advantage of the season when the mind is perturbed by any strong passion, in order to hurry his victims onward to some act of violence from which in other circumstances they would have shrunk. Haman at this time was precisely in such a mood as made him an easy prey to the enemy. His self-importance, his worldly grandeur, the king's favour, all set at nought by Mordecai, aggravated his deadly resentment, and made him seek the destruction of the whole Jewish race. It could not have been but by Satanic influence that a scheme of such vast and daring atrocity was devised. There is nothing said in the history to show that the disposition of Haman was habitually cruel, that he was one who would have taken pleasure in inflicting pain for no reason but to gratify a propensity of his nature. From the brief glances we obtain of his domestic life, he seems to have enjoyed the confidence and affection of his family, as far as was compatible with the usages of the age and country; a circumstance which certainly seems to warrant the conclusion that he was not of a temper unmixedly cruel and tyrannical. But when the master passion of revenge took possession of him, then by working upon it Satan transformed him into a very fiend. And it has always been one of the devices of the enemy to drive men into criminal excesses to their own ruin through the instrumentality of some favourite lust or appetite. It was the covetous spirit of Judas that opened a way to the tempter to hurry him to betray the Saviour. It was an unmanly fear on the part of Pilate, lest he should be misrepresented to the Roman emperor, that the tempter took occasion of to lead him, in opposition to all his convictions, to deliver up Jesus to be crucified. All need to be upon their guard, then, against the wiles of the crafty adversary, and to strive to have their desires and feelings so kept under the control of the

Divine law that he may not through their own sinful inadvertence obtain the mastery over them, and lead them captive at his will.—*Davidson*.

How insatiable is revenge, especially when it is associated with national and religious rancour! Haman learned that Mordecai was a Jew, and he resolves at once on the total extermination of that people. Nero wished that the Romans had but one neck, that he might despatch them at once; Haman resolves by one decree to sweep off "all the Jews which were in all the kingdom of Ahasuerus." That the quarrel was not merely personal, but was inflamed by national hatred, is evident from the designation, "the Jews' enemy," repeatedly given to Haman in this book. The discovery that Mordecai was of Jewish extraction, while it gave a keenness to his insult, added a sweetness to Haman's meditated revenge.—*McCrie*.

For the king had so commanded concerning him.—And if the king had commanded these servile souls to worship a dog or a cat, as the Egyptians did; a golden image, as Nebuchadnezzar's subjects did; to turn the glory of the incorruptible God into the similitude of a corruptible man, of four-footed beasts or creeping things, they would have done it. Most people are of King Henry's religion, as the proverb is, resolving to do as the most do, though thereby they be undone for ever.

But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.—He did not, he durst not, though pressed to it with greatest importunity. And why? Not because Haman wore a picture openly in his bosom, as the Chaldee paraphrast and Aben-Ezra give the reason; not merely because he was a cursed Amalekite; but because the Persian kings required that themselves and their chief favourites (such as proud Haman was) should be revered with a kind of divine honour, more than was due to any man. This the Jews by their law were forbidden to do. It was not, therefore, pride or self-willedness that made Mordecai so stiff in the hams that he would not bend to Haman, but fear of sin, and conscience of duty. He knew that he had better

offend all the world than God and his own conscience.

That they told Haman.—Purposely to pick a thank and curry favour. And although it was truth they told Haman, yet because they did it not for any love to the truth, nor for respect to justice, nor for the bettering of either party, but only to undo the one and to incense the other, they were no better than slanderers.

And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai.—He thought it a small matter, saith Josephus, a thing below him, too little for his revenge, which, like fire, burneth all it can lay hold upon, especially when, as here, it ariseth from ambition. Haman thought scorn to foul his fingers with Mordecai alone; the whole nation must perish, and all the children of God that were scattered abroad.—*Trapp*.

"Why transgressest thou the king's commands?" The servants of the king said to Mordecai, "Why wilt thou refuse to bow before Haman, transgressing thus the wishes of the king? Do we not bow before him?" "Ye are foolish," answered Mordecai; "ay, wanting in reason. Listen to me. Shall a mortal who must return to the dust be glorified? Shall I bow down before one born of woman, whose days are short? When he is small he cries and weeps as a child; when he grows older sorrow and sighing are his portion; his days are full of wrath and anger, and at the end he returns to dust. Shall I bow to one like him? No, I prostrate myself before the eternal God, who lives for ever. He who dwells in heaven and bears the world in the hollow of his hand. His word changes sunlight to darkness, his command illumines the deepest gloom. His wisdom made the world; He placed the boundaries of the mighty sea. The waters are his, the sweet and the salt. To the struggling waves he says, 'Be still; thus far shalt thou come, no further, that the earth may remain dry for my people.' To him, the great Creator and Ruler of the universe, and to no other, will I bow." Haman was wroth against Mordecai, and said to him, "Why art thou so stiff-necked? Did not thy forefather

bow down to mine?" "How?" replied Mordecai; "which of my ancestors bowed before forefather of thine?" Then Haman answered, "Jacob thy forefather bowed down to Esau, his brother, who was my forefather." "Not so," answered Mordecai, "for I am descended from Benjamin, and when Jacob bowed to Esau, Benjamin was not yet born. Benjamin never bowed until his descendants prostrated themselves in the holy temple, when the divinity of God rested within its sacred portals, and all Israel united with him. I will not bow before the wicked Haman."—*Talmud*.

He hearkened not unto them.—He would not be persuaded from his purpose to remain true to the principles of his religion. His course was dictated not by obstinacy, but by firmness of religious principle. Herodotus relates the case of certain Spartans who visited Shushan in the time of Xerxes, and, when ushered into the royal presence, refused to prostrate themselves and worship before the king, on the ground that it was contrary to their customs to worship a man.

They told Haman.—Until they told him, Haman seems not to have noticed that Mordecai did not bow down to him. —*American Commentary*.

Haman strove to destroy all the Jews in the whole realm of Ahasuerus, as being of the same mind with Mordecai. In the West such an idea as this would never have occurred to a revengeful man; but in the East it is different. The massacres of a people, a race, a class, have at all times been among the incidents of history, and would naturally present themselves to the mind of a statesman. The Magophonia, or a great massacre of the Magi at the accession of Darius Hystaspis, was an event not fifty years old in the twelfth year of Xerxes, and was commemorated annually. A massacre of the Scythians had occurred about a century previously.—*Racine*.

God is so great, so sovereign, that if thou pleasest him not he accounts thee an enemy; if thou beest not subject to him thou art a rebel. As kings, yea, favourites, thinking themselves so great, that if any be not wholly theirs, if any man veils not, stoops not, their spirits rise

against them as enemies, as Haman's did against Mordecai; and so, in like manner, Art thou not king? says Jezebel to Ahab; and therefore judged it an affront to him to be denied anything. In like manner, Am I not God? says the Lord. If there be any perverseness of spirit shown to kings, it is interpreted enmity, because their greatness expects all should serve and be subject to them. Now the greatness of God is such as it necessarily and justly draws this on with it. Hence the carnal mind is said to be enmity against God. —*Goodwin*.

The persons with whom Mordecai had to do at the king's gate were, as has been said, probably more curious than malicious in the first instance; but a man is none the better liked for taking up higher ground than that occupied by those about him. The busy-bodies wished to "see whether Mordecai's matters would stand," whether the supreme power would recognize a Jew's conscience, and, if not, what a Jew would then do with his conscience; so they informed Haman. And they did see, plentifully. The first effect was to reveal the paltriness of Haman. He was full of rage where a man of any greatness of soul would have been only amused. "Who would be angry with a Quaker for not taking off his hat when he comes into a room?" But Haman was one of those whom if you strip, seeking to find the greatness beneath their fine clothes, lo! there is nothing! That is, nothing great or good. For there is something bad and ugly—black revenge. Justice is said to blindfold herself that she may hold the scales evenly, not knowing what has been put into each; but revenge shuts both eyes that it may see no scales at all. What monstrous disproportion between the offence and the penalty, to avenge a small personal affront received from one Jew by "causing to perish in one day all Jews, old and young." To account for this we must keep in mind the ancient national feud already explained; and we shall do well to remember that instances are not wanting of the same deadly hatred against the seed of the

woman. To say nothing of Nero or Domitian, nor of Radama in Madagascar quite recently, let us recall the well-known case of the massacre of fifty-six thousand Protestants on the eve of St. Bartholomew's day in France.—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 7.

THE BLIND METHOD OF REVENGE.

This is curious, that there should be method in madness. Insanity is the result of mere mental confusion or distraction. Sometimes it arises from the preponderance of one idea, and that idea is pursued with marvellous persistence. It has its method, but by being narrow in its vision it becomes blind in its pursuit. Revenge when it becomes a master passion is the worst madness. It has its method, but no wonder that it is blind. It is persistent in seeking to carry out its revengeful project. It is patient until the time has arrived to strike the deadly blow.

I. Revenge is blind in its method. Let the conduct of Haman, as the embodiment of revenge, be our illustration. He caused the lot to be cast in order to find out the favourable day for the accomplishment of his fiendish purpose. We are astonished to find method in him who was "full of wrath;" but we are not astonished to find that he was blind in his proceeding. (*a*) He was blind to the fact that there is no chance. His course was self-contradictory. He consulted chance in order to make a definite arrangement. A kind of blindness men often display. (*b*) He was blind to the fact that so-called chance might as easily be against him as for him. He evidently thought himself all-important, and that the paper drawn out of the pitcher would most certainly have written on it the lucky day. Men that trust to chance will in the long run find that they have been fools for their pains. (*c*) He was blind to the fact that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." It was so here. The lot was disposed to the complete discomfiture and overthrow of revengeful Haman, and to the salvation of Mordecai and his people.

II. Revenge is injurious in its persistence. Haman persisted in his revengeful purpose. The pertinacity of the man is marvellous. What a glorious revolution would soon take place if the good were as persistent in the pursuit of merciful purposes as the bad are in revengeful projects. Every bad passion is injurious in its permanence. More injurious to its subject than to its object. Haman was doing himself more injury and rendering himself more miserable than he could have done or rendered Mordecai even if all his purpose had been accomplished. "Let not the sun go down on your wrath" is a wise lesson. The wise will let their anger cool, but in the bosom of a fool it burns till morning light.

III. Revenge is destructive in its patience. Haman was willing to wait twelve months in order that his revenge might be the more signally marked, and his triumph the greater. But his very patience worked his ruin. We sometimes say time is on the side of him who will but wait. But time asks what is the character of the waiter, and what is the purpose he has in view. Time is not on the side of revengeful waiters. Time holds in its hands no rewards to be presented in the distant future to the wicked. Every man must suffer either here or hereafter who pursues a course of seeking to avenge his wrongs.

Let Haman's followers ponder the telling proverbs—"Curses, like chickens, always come home to roost;" they return, that is, to those from whom they went forth. "Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them." "Harm watch, harm catch." "Who sows thorns, let him not walk barefoot." Hear the instructive voice of Paul—"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore

if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 7.

In the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus.—When Esther had now been queen above four years, and, being greatly beloved, was in a capacity to do her people good. This was a sweet providence ; the remedy was ready before the disease broke out. No country hath more venomous creatures than Egypt, none more antidotes. So godliness hath many troubles, and so many helps against trouble.—*Trapp.*

They cast Pur, that is, the lot.—The Septuagint preserves a clause of this verse which assists to explain its meaning. It thus reads, "They cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month (that he might destroy in one day the race of Mordecai, and the lot fell for the fourteenth) of the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar." From this it appears that the lots were cast in order to determine the month and the day of the month which might be most propitious for this barbarous undertaking, or most calamitous for the Jews.—*Illustrated Commentary.*

The method of procedure seems to have been this, that at the beginning of the first month Haman caused the diviners whom he kept about him to cast the lot to determine what day of the month, and what month of the year, would bring his design to a successful termination. In this manner he learnt that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month would be the propitious day. The interval was long, nearly a whole year ; but this was brought about by a special providence, in order that the scheme might be defeated, and the projector of it visited with the punishment he merited. Under all systems of false religion, divination, or the attempt to pry into futurity so as to get light cast upon contingent affairs, has been largely practised. We find reference made to it in the Book of Genesis, as an Egyptian custom, when the cup which was put into Benjamin's sack is called that by which Joseph divined. The Babylonians

or Chaldeans, however, seem to have been addicted to divination beyond all other nations, and were indeed proverbial for the use of it. There are several references made to this in the prophetic books. The Persians also were addicted to the same practices ; and it is said that among that people even at the present day, no one commences a journey, or almost any work the most trifling, without consulting an almanac, or an astrologer, for a fortunate moment. It would seem, indeed, as if there were a natural tendency in the human mind to read futurity by certain devices of its own. We hear sometimes of individuals in our own day who are so weak as to suffer themselves to become the dupes of designing knaves, who for money pretend by certain signs and omens to foretell what will be the result of matters in which they are interested. One could afford to smile at the absurd credulity which thus allows itself to be imposed upon, if it were not that the cherishing the desire to know the future, and having recourse to any such means to have it gratified, is denounced in the Scripture as impiety. The Jewish people were solemnly warned against such procedure, that they might not by means of it degrade and pollute themselves as the heathen did. No rational man will suppose that by casting lots, or by observing the flight of birds, or by inspecting the entrails of an animal slain in sacrifice, or by astrology, or by any of the other methods which were employed to discover what day or hour would be suitable for an undertaking, or what would be the issue of it, a true result could be obtained. Yet, as all these things formed part of the instrumentality by which Satan kept up his dominion over the minds of men, we can conceive that sometimes in the Divine providence they might be permitted to take effect, to punish those who were given over to a blind and reprobate mind, and that, as in the case of Haman's lots,

there might be an overruling of human sin and folly to work out the purposes of the Divine government.

It is natural for us to desire to lift up the veil; and sometimes, in pressing emergencies, we would give much to be enabled to do this. But since the word of God tells us that all events are under his control, and that his eye is ever on his people, and all that concerns them, for their good, we may well wait patiently for the evolution of his purposes.—*Davidson*.

Superstition and imposture have always been ready to lend their aid to the worst and most diabolical deeds. It was customary among the ancients to divide their days into lucky and unlucky, and they were anxious to undertake any great work on a propitious day. Among the various ways to which they had recourse for ascertaining this was the lot, which was used on this occasion by Haman. It is of little importance to ascertain the particular mode of casting the lot, whether it was by means of dice, or other instruments cast into the urn, or by throwing arrows or other missiles, accompanied with certain magical actions.

Observe the overruling providence of God. During an interval of eleven months, Mordecai and Esther had time to use means for defeating the design, and if they proved unsuccessful, the Jews had time to shift for their lives. The hearts of all men are in the hand of the Lord, who can turn them as he pleaseth. Haman was the slave of super-

stition, which controlled his most violent passions, and by means of it his wrath was restrained, and its intentions brought to nought. "The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." "Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him, and breaks the neck of the plot."—*McCrie*.

There is a proverb to the effect that the devil limps, and any who look thoughtfully into history or more private affairs will find it confirmed. That is to say, the god of this world betrays himself, and cannot help betraying himself, by leaving some point unguarded, by doing something unwise, even when much power and cunning have been brought into play. Or, to put the same truth in another aspect, when the enemies of God and man are most busy, and seem to be most successful, "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." There were blunders in Haman's plot against the people of God which secured its failure. Why did he offer two millions sterling as compensation for the loss of revenue, at the same time that he was telling Ahasuerus it was "not for the king's profit to suffer" the Jews to live? If the king had taken time to think, he would have detected a selfish motive under the inconsistent offer. It did not escape Esther when her time came to speak.—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 8—11.

A FALSE ASPECT OF THE TRUTH.

Success begets confidence. It was so in this case. Haman had been successful, and consequently became confident. He knew his present power with the king, and therefore takes his steps accordingly. He lays his plans before he makes his wicked request unto the monarch. But a man may be blindly confident, and his over-confidence may lead to his destruction, as it did in the case of Haman. There may be too much caution. A man may be afraid to take a bold step when boldness is required and is safety. But there may be too little caution. A man, for the want of caution, may take a leap in the dark, and plunge into the abyss of ruin. Here Haman displayed a want of wise caution. He is now taking the dangerous leap. Soon we shall see him plunging in the abyss.

I. A true description. Haman had accurately studied the condition of the

Jewish people, and was acquainted with their internal regulations, and he describes them correctly. Our enemies tell us the truth. In one aspect Haman was a truthful delineator. Josephus himself could not have done better than Haman. He describes them—(a) As a scattered people. Throughout the extensive kingdom of Ahasuerus these Jews were scattered, mixing with the people and yet distinct. Wherever they were they preserved their nationality. Wonderful race these Jews! Wonderful in Haman's time, wonderful still in Disraeli's time. A people scattered and peeled through all time, but a people never stripped of that marvellous quality by which they are unique. (b) As a peculiar people. They had laws diverse from all people. These laws were God-given. These laws were the fountain from which has flowed the best judicial streams this world has seen. The ancient Jewish legislator, in the very childhood of the world's history, promulgated a legal code which nineteenth century legislators may still study with profit. No wonder that these laws were diverse from all people. These laws were Divine; other laws are human. These laws, in their leading principles, were cosmopolitan; other laws are local. These laws were intended for the formation of a glorious Divine society. Other laws are for the formation of human societies. These laws are eternal; but other laws, in so far as they are divergent, are temporary. Haman was right, and yet Haman was wrong.

II. A false implication and declaration. It is sometimes said that the tailor makes the man, and so we may say that the speaker makes or unmakes the truth. Truth may be so dressed as to look like and to do the work of falsehood. Haman makes two false implications, and one false declaration. (a) A scattered people, and therefore influential for evil. These Jews are amongst all the people in the provinces of thy kingdom, and therefore consider how much evil they may do. What power for sowing in all directions the seeds of rebellion! (b) A peculiar people, and therefore dangerous. They have laws and opinions of their own. They are likely to think for themselves. A race of thinkers is not promising soil for despots. These Jews were not molluscous animals. Despotism cannot long flourish where backbone and strong-muscled men are permitted. Haman was nearer the truth than he imagined. Here is a false declaration—"neither keep they the king's laws." The laws of God are never opposed to any laws that are for the welfare of a nation. These Jews, in so far as they were God-fearing people, would not refuse to keep any law that was for the good of the kingdom of Ahasuerus. Mordecai was a better keeper of the law than Haman.

III. An unjust inference. "Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." Haman's logic would not meet with the approval of Aristotle. His premises did not warrant his conclusion. Defective logic more often arises from badness of heart than from weakness of intellect. The pure in heart will come to right conclusions, though they may not have the power of putting their reasoning into syllogistic form. Oh, if the king had only then turned to the book of the chronicles, and read the record of Mordecai's faithfulness, he would have seen that it was for his profit to suffer this despised race.

IV. An artful petition. Haman artfully keeps his wily and wicked project in the background. Here is—(a) *Lying obsequiousness*. "If it please the king." Haman is seeking to please himself. Little he cares about the king's pleasure, so that his own revenge is satisfied. (b) *Feigned liberality*. How wonderfully generous malice can be! A little forgiveness to Mordecai, even if Mordecai had sinned, would have been truer liberality than this magnificent offer of wealth to be poured into the king's treasury. (c) *Ostentatious zeal*. How zealous people are when there is a wicked motive working. Haman pretends a great deal of zeal for the king, but he has zeal for himself. Oh, how often self creeps in when we pretend to be zealous for the Lord of hosts. Yes, when we have no pretence, when we are trying to be sincere, how much of self in our best works.

V. A weak compliance. The king at once, without inquiry, without exercising

his intelligence, gave the needful power into the hands of this wicked Haman. Weak and self-indulgent people do great harm because they will not be at the trouble to think. The ring of royal authority was given to the revengeful favourite. The king was undermining his own power. The nation has indeed reason to mourn when wicked men are exalted. What a satire is the king's declaration to Haman—unconscious it may be, but none the less biting when observed—"The silver is given unto thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee." Little good would Haman do unto the people.

In our utterances let us put the truth in its proper relations, so that a correct impression may be produced, and that no misrepresentation may be the consequence of our declarations. In our hearing of statements let us have no ear for the mere slanderer, let us properly weigh and measure the charges brought forward. Let us see to it that our motives are pure, and then our vision will be clear, our reasoning valid, and our actions honourable.

"A lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies;
For a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

HAMAN'S MURDEROUS PROPOSAL (verse 8).

Revenge is cruel, but never more cruel than when it has its foundation in mortified pride. In the passage before us it is carried to an almost incredible extent. Haman occupied the highest post of honour, next to the royal family, in the Persian empire. All the subjects in the kingdom bowed down to him. But there was a poor man, one Mordecai, who sat at the king's gate, and consequently was often passed by Haman, who refused to pay him this homage. At this neglect Haman was grievously offended. He deemed it an insufferable insult, which could be expiated only by the death of the offender. On inquiring into Mordecai's habits and connections, Haman found that he was a Jew; and conceiving probably that this contemptuous spirit pervaded that whole nation, and accounting it a small matter to sacrifice the life of one single individual, he determined if possible to destroy the whole nation at once; and accordingly he made this proposal to King Ahasuerus, engaging from his own resources to make up to the king's treasury whatever loss might arise to the revenue from the proposed measure. Now this proposal appearing at first sight so very extraordinary, I will endeavour to set before you—

I. The commonness of it. In every age of the world have God's people been hated, for the very reasons that are here assigned—"Their laws are diverse from those of all other people, neither keep they the laws of the kingdoms where they dwell." They worship the one true and living God. Of course, whatever laws are inconsistent with the laws of God they disobey. On this account they are hated, reviled, and persecuted. David tells us of confederacies formed to "cut off the Jews from being a nation." So, in the early ages of Christianity, there were not less than ten strenuous efforts made to attain this object. And at different periods since that time has persecution raged to the utmost extent to destroy, if possible, all real piety from the face of the earth. But we need not go back to former ages for an elucidation of this truth. True, the cruelties of martyrdom are stayed; but private animosity is indulged as far as the laws of the land wherein we live will admit, and every person who thoroughly devotes himself to God is made to feel its baneful influence. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Passing over the inhumanity of this proposal, as being too obvious to be insisted on, I proceed to notice—

II. The impiety of it. The very accusation brought against the Jews by Haman shows what is the real ground of enmity against the Lord's people; it is that they

serve God, whilst the rest of the world bow down to idols ; and that in this determination of theirs they inflexibly adhere to the dictates of their own conscience. This is universal amongst all the people of the Lord. But this preference of God to man is the very thing which gives offence. Look at the prophets and apostles, and see what was the ground of the world's opposition to them. And this leads me to show—

III. The folly of it. Can it be thought that such feeble worms as we should be able to prevail against Almighty God ? Haman, with all his power, could not prevail against the Jews, who yet, in appearance, were altogether in his hands. The whole power of the Roman empire, by whomsoever wielded, could not root out the disciples of the Christian Church, “nor shall the gates of hell ever prevail” against the weakest of God's faithful people.

Address—(a) Those who are the objects of the world's hatred. Realize the promises which God has given, and then say, Shall I be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord my maker ? (b) Those who are unhappily prejudiced against the Lord's people. If you cannot see with their eyes, do not endeavour to make them see with yours, unless in a way of sober argumentation and of candid reference to the word of God. To have recourse to derision or persecution of any kind will only involve your own souls in yet deeper guilt than you already lie under for rejecting the gospel of Christ. Beware how you imitate the unbelievers of former ages in opposing the work of God in others ; for if you do not succeed you only fight against God for nought ; and if you do succeed you will perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls of others, for assuredly “their blood will be required at your hands.”—*Abridged from Simcox's 'Hore Homiletice.'*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 8—11.

Therefore it is not for the king's profit.
—See how this sycophant fills his mouth with arguments, the better to achieve his desire. An elaborate set speech he maketh, neither is there a word in it but what might seem to have weight. He pretends the king's profit and the public good, concealing and dissembling his ambition, avarice, envy, malignity, that set him a-work. Politicians when they soar highest are like the eagle, which, whilst aloft, hath her eye still upon the prey, which by this means she spies sooner, and seizes upon better. Haman holds it not fit there should be more religions than one in a kingdom, for preventing of troubles. Nebuchadnezzar was of the same mind when he commanded all men to worship his golden image. But must all, therefore, die that will not do it ? and is it for the king's profit that the righteous be rooted out ? Is not the holy seed the stay of the state, the beauty and bulwark of the nation ?—*Trapp.*

It is not for the king's profit to suffer

them.—Worldly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit or loss ; neither have they grace to know that nothing is profitable but what is honest, nothing so desperately inconvenient as wickedness ; they must needs offend by rule, that measure all things by profit, and measure profit by their imagination. How easy is it to suggest strange untruths when there is nobody to make answer ! False Haman ! how is it not for the king's profit to suffer the Jews ? If thou construe this profit for honour, the king's honour is in the multitude of subjects ; and what people more numerous than they ? if for gain, the king's profit is in the largeness of his tributes ; and what people are more deep in their payments ? if for service, what people are more officious ? How can it stand with the king's profit to bereave himself of subjects, his subjects of their lives, his exchequer of their tributes, his state of their defence ? He is a weak politician that knows not to gild over the worst project with a pretence of public utility.

No name under heaven hath made so many fools, so many villains, as this of profit.—*Bishop Hall.*

Along the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, already renowned for their schools of learning; high up in the mountains of Kurdistan, where perchance their descendants linger still; all the dispersed settlers were included in those words, which might stand as the motto of the larger part of the Jewish race ever since—which might have been said of them by Tacitus in the Roman empire, or by the Arabian or English chroniclers of the middle ages. "The line of beacon-lights kindled from hill to hill along the whole route from Jerusalem to Babylon, from Olivet to Sartaba, from Sartaba to Grophniah, from Grophniah to Haveran, from Haveran to Beth-Baltin, — waving the torches upwards and downwards, till the whole country of the captivity appeared a blazing fire,"—was an apt emblem of the sympathetic links which bound all these settlements together. Of this vast race, for whom so great a destiny was reserved, the Book of Esther recognized as by a prophetic instinct the future importance.—*Stanley.*

I will pay ten thousand talents of silver.—This was above two millions of our money, which Haman offered to pay into the treasury to indemnify the king for the loss of revenue which he would sustain by the destruction of the Jews. That a foreigner, and probably a captive, was enabled at the Persian court to acquire such wealth as the offer of so enormous a sum implies, makes it less wonderful that Nehemiah was in a condition to sustain the charges of his government from his own resources. It will be recollected that Haman appears to have been the chief minister of the king, and that functionary enjoys peculiar opportunities for the acquisition of wealth. On New Year's Day the king receives the offerings of his princes and nobles. On one such occasion, when Mr. Morier was present, the offering of the person holding this office surpassed every other in value, amounting to about £30,000 in gold coin. Other statements are extant concerning the extraordinary wealth possessed by some of the subjects

of the ancient Persian empire. In the reign of Xerxes a noble Lydian named Pythius entertained the whole Persian army—the largest ever assembled—on its march towards Greece; and then freely offered to contribute all his property in gold and silver to the support of the war. It amounted altogether to 2000 talents of silver and four millions (wanting 7000) of gold daries — more than four millions of our money; besides which he had, as he said, estates and slaves which would still afford him a suitable maintenance. This noble offer was declined by the king, as that of Haman was by Ahasuerus.

Sealed with the king's ring.—In the British museum are preserved specimens of Egyptian seals of the ring class. Some of them are finger-seal rings; but the larger are scarabæus or beetle seals. These are all mounted in handles, or rings of metal, in which they revolve on pivots. This was doubtless to render them more portable, while it enabled the face to be turned outward, so as to increase their effect as ornaments, and to enable them to be worn with more convenience—attached, as they probably were, to some part of the person.—*Illustrated Family Bible.*

So do injured pride, envy, malice, hatred still seek to blast the fairest reputation by baseless calumny. The word of a friend is trusted, and the slander is believed and repeated, and acquires strength from its currency. If we blame Ahasuerus for too readily listening to the invective of Haman, and condemning the Jews unheard and untried, we should be on our guard against committing the same sin, by giving heed to scandal in regard to others without careful personal inquiry and observation, lest we should be only crediting the creations of the worst passions and distempers of our fallen natures. The Saviour was calumniated by his adversaries because he spake the truth. They hated him, and therefore spake against him. And the whole history of the Church of Christ upon earth bears evidence that the policy of our great adversary is to traduce and vilify those whom he desires to ruin. By this means he would break their

influence and tare-sow all their good. Let us be on our guard against aiding and abetting him in this matter.

Another artifice of the enemy, which was also illustrated by Haman, is to assume the air and attitude of apparent disinterestedness. Judas concealed his real feelings and motives when betraying our Lord under the symbol of affection. And Haman sought to insinuate his love of the empire and the stability of the throne as his only motives for the destruction of several millions of unoffending persons, by offering to pay down ten thousand talents of silver. It reminds one of the many specious schemes which are constantly being thrust before the public by designing worldlings—who offer large bonuses with nothing to sustain their magnificent prospects. The projectors of these schemes affect only the public good—the rapid and certain enrichment of those who will give them their confidence and their money; and not until the bubble bursts do the poor victims of their deceit apprehend the real motives by which they were influenced. In like manner do early temptations to evil all hold out the promise of present good. Some pleasure to be attained, or advancement reached, or laurel wreath worn. What a piece of disguised disinterestedness was it on the part of Satan when he proposed to give to Christ all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them! Men are not so wise and quick as was our Lord in discovering the real motive of the tempter, and resisting him by a reference to the word of God. They are captivated by the show of disinterestedness, and only come to a knowledge of their mistake in the reaping of its fruits. Meanwhile, it serves the purpose of the enemy by inciting trust, and preventing religious reflection and inquiry, just as Haman's silver talents blinded Ahasuerus to the dark-hearted malignity of their promiser. Let us bring every temptation to the test of an enlightened conscience, and the penetrating, exposing power of God's word; and under the mask of disinterestedness we shall discover the poisoned sting secreted in the

suggested sin. "Do as I bid thee, O king; and thou shalt rid the empire of a mighty burden, and secure greater stability and peace for thy throne and government." No; the policy of the arch-fiend, through his agents, is not changed from that which he followed in the garden of Eden. "Am not I your disinterested benefactor?" "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."—*McEwan*.

There is a false halo of grandeur shed around the path of the conqueror, and there is not so palpable a connection between his exploits and absolute revolting ferocity, as there is between the decree of Artaxerxes and Haman, and the execution of it. But looking from the cruelty which is glossed over by the name of military glory, we even find cool, unmitigated atrocities in the records of civilized nations, which are as disgraceful to humanity as Haman's—yea, which surpass them. Haman was a heathen, a stranger, therefore, to the softening power of religion, and we see in him only an illustration of what human nature is when left to itself, without the control of any pure and heavenly influence. But what shall we say of the indiscriminate massacre of the Protestants (1572) in Paris, and other parts of France, wherein at least 70,000 persons in brief space fell victims to the bigotry and cruelty of the king and his advisers? That was a tragedy contrived in cold blood, and advised by favourites, to glut the revenge of Papal Rome. Day and hour were fixed here, as they were by Haman. But, unhappily, day and hour were kept, and the true worshippers of God, the lovers of his truth, the best friends of religion and morality, the excellent of the earth, were massacred because they would pay homage to Christ himself, and not to the Roman Antichrist. And what shall we say of the cruelties,—that is too tame a word,—what shall we say of the horrible barbarities which, by the command of the Romish tyrant, whose hands are red with the blood of the saints, were perpetrated in the valleys of the Waldenses,

when not only men, but feeble women and helpless children, were savagely tortured and slain by a brutal soldiery for no other reason than that they would worship God as his word commands? And are not scenes of equal atrocity set before us in the history of our own country, when wholesale murder was authorized by royal edict because our forefathers would not take their religion and forms of worship from the enactments of the civil powers, but would serve God as they believed the Bible required, and as their consciences approved? Haman's character is one of the blackest in history. But on a calm review, and with full allowance for the time and circumstances in which he lived, he is pure as compared with the infamous King of France, who looked from his palace window and enjoyed the scene of slaughter in his capital; with the savages who shed the blood of the noble martyrs in the valleys of the Alps; and with the last monarchs of the Stuart line and their wretched accomplices, who persecuted to the death the resolute defenders of civil and religious freedom. But will not God visit for these things? Nay, should we not rather say, Hath he not visited already? The visitation of Haman we shall soon have before us. Deeply has France already paid for the innocent blood which her rulers shed long ago, and her soil, it is to be feared, is not yet cleansed from the pollution. Other persecutors have had their award also. And the great central persecuting power, Rome herself, will in due time have her foretold destiny fully accomplished. As she hath done it will be done to her. Even if the word of God were silent on the subject, we could not but anticipate that that anti-Christian power, to whose direct influence may be traced persecution and bloodshed such as heathenism never was stained with, will have the measure meted to her which she has meted out to others. But we need not speak doubtfully here. The Divine word has fixed the doom of Papal Rome. And if she seems to be raising herself in our day, it is assuredly only to give the greater impulse to her final ruin, that

she may fall from the greater height, when, like the great millstone cast by the angel into the sea, she shall be engulfed in the abyss of the wrath of God.—*Davidson*.

That believers obey not the laws of the king has always been the chief complaint among the anti-Christian rabble, of which Haman furnishes a copy. The children of God, in their eyes, must ever be insurrectionists, disturbers of the peace, persons subject to no law or order, and by whom the public weal is endangered.—*Berlemburg Bible*.

Satan, as Christ says, is a liar and a murderer. Hence he is ever busy in persecuting the Church with his lying and murderous designs. You have heard before his lie: The people are using new laws and ceremonies, and they de-pise the edicts of the king. Now hear his murderous words: If it please thee, decree that this people be destroyed.—*Brenz*.

A man resigned to the will of God will disregard the laws of man whenever these stand opposed to the will and laws of God, however much he may suffer thereby. When men disobey the laws of man and violate them, it is very soon taken notice of; but if they violate the law of God, then no one seems to observe the fact. We should not make man our idol, nor make flesh our arm. Immoderate ambition generally breaks out into cruelty. The anger of great men is fierce; hence one should have a care not to arouse the same against one's self.—*Starke*.

When wicked men cannot otherwise persecute the righteous, then his religion and laws must furnish them with a cause and a covering for their evil intentions. In important matters it is not good to render a hasty judgment, it is better to reflect. God permits the wicked to have success beyond their own expectation at times, but afterward destruction will come all the more unexpectedly.—*Starke*.

The sorrowful condition of the Jews becomes very apparent and plain as here revealed; likewise the just judgment of God is here fulfilled. He says, They would not obey God in their own land,

where they enjoyed such great freedom ; but now they groan under the severe service that presses upon them, and they are brought into the risk of life itself. They refused to assemble in the sanctuaries of Jerusalem under their own kings ; they ran after the golden calves,

the sacred groves, and idols, and superstitions of the heathen. Now they are placed and scattered under the most tyrannical form of government. They neither can nor dare congregate to offer a service of praise to God.—*Fearful*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 12—14.

FRUITLESS PREPARATIONS.

Haman had no regard to the contingency of human affairs. He was blind to the fact that it is not in man's power to control events, and arrange for the future. He had not learnt the wise man's lesson—"Boast not thyself of to-morrow ; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." To-morrow is a humiliating term often to those who have far-reaching designs. To-morrow never comes when we work under the guidance of human arrogance. It never comes exactly as we purposed. The seed may flourish to-morrow, but the sower has perished ; or the seed which he has sown flourishes to his destruction. Enjoy thyself, Haman, to-day, call forth thy scribes, send forth thy bloody edicts, for to-morrow is coming with crushing doom ! We all need to look into the future in order to read the lesson of our weakness.

I. Here is unseemly haste. No sooner had Haman received the king's permission than he goes forth to his work of revenge. He is in a hurry to set in operation the plans which should work to the destruction of the despised race. There would have been propriety in Haman pausing and considering well before sending forth the orders which were intended to work such vast mischief. Better still if Haman had said, "This scheme is an unworthy one. I am compromising my dignity and my manhood. I will go back to the king, and undo the evil I have sought to accomplish." Better think twice before committing ourselves to an unworthy action.

II. Here are inconsistent precursory measures. The bad are always inconsistent. Their lives are not harmonious. Wickedness renders a man inconsistent. The good in man, or at least the voice of conscience, works against or speaks against the evil. There would be times when Haman would feel the dreadful nature of the enterprise upon which he had set his heart. Revenge impelled to action, but conscience still spoke in reproving tones. We have pictured Haman as the revengeful man, being willing to wait in order that there might be the more signal display of his malicious power ; but here we find him proceeding in regular method, as if to justify his deeds. It may be, however, that Haman was afraid of his own position. If we have given him credit for too much conscientiousness, we cannot easily charge him with too much selfishness. All must be done according to law, that Haman's enemies may not in the future have the power of charging him with open-handed crime. Obedience to the eternal law of right is the only method by which human lives can be rendered consistent and harmonious.

III. Here is a low estimate of human life. This is one of the strange anomalies, that great men, as the world accounts greatness, think so little of human life. Is ambition to be fed?—human lives must be slaughtered. Is revenge to have its way?—human lives must be sacrificed. Kings, conquerors, and statesmen have regarded no life as precious which stood in the way of their ambitious schemes. Haman was bad, but there are more Hamans than we think of in the historical records. The low estimate of life is here shown—(a) In the *unmethodical nature of the slaughter designed*. The three terms—to destroy, to

kill, and to cause to perish—may be employed to give intensity to the barbarous decree. But they also set forth the dreadful fact that the poor people were to be killed anyhow. Let the servants of revenge do their work after any fashion, so that it is done effectually, and the hated race are removed from the face of the earth. (b) In the *indiscriminate nature of the slaughter designed*. “All Jews, both young and old, little children and women.” Revenge would glut itself. The young and the fair, the beautiful and the innocent, the wise and the virtuous, must be slain. These bleating lambs, what have they done that the light of life must be quenched in its very dawn? (c) In the *rapacity after property*. The spoil of the slaughtered is to be taken for a prey. Life *versus* property. This decree is one of the unwritten decrees of modern civilization. Let the spoil of the slaughtered be taken for a prey. Men and women, fair maids, and even little children are slaughtered in order to increase property.

IV. Here is wickedness bolstered up by human authority. “The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.” Wickedness wears a mask; it shrinks from the exposure of its own deformity. State policy requires the enormous sacrifice. Capital must have its due return. Business is business. The law of supply and demand must have its way, though that may be through human blood. These are some of the flimsy and false excuses with which sin dresses up itself in order to make a respectable appearance.

Great men should try to get a true idea of the importance of life. Such an idea might save them from mad and wicked enterprises. God has crowned life with an excellent glory. To preserve life nature yields her million products, and pours into the lap of man her myriad fruits;—to promote its welfare the sun bathes the world with his influences, and the component parts of the atmosphere are blended together in relative proportions;—and to increase its pleasures the flowers give forth their fragrance and show their beauty, hills and mountains rise in grandeur, sweet dales rest in their encircling embrace; the birds make the air vocal with their songs of praise; and the stars gem the midnight sky, forming a glorious canopy for man. For the development of man’s whole life time is not adequate, and eternity is the sphere in which an ever-expanding life shall work on to unknown heights of blessed perfection. Life is great, and high estimates ought to be formed of its worth. *Statesmen should remember that the true wealth of a community is its men.*

“Ill fares the land, to hast’ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country’s pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.”

All ought to remember that life is ignoble when passion is allowed to rule. How many lives are thus rendered inglorious! Lives with fair opportunities for development are blasted by an overmastering passion. Lives with extensive prospects for usefulness are crushed by the influence of ignoble motives. What a position was that to which Haman was raised! How many might have blessed his memory! His name might have been lauded by the national orators, and sung by the national poets. But his name is scouted, and his memory is covered with opprobrium. The name of the wicked shall rot. The memory of the just only is blessed. Let passion then be subordinated to principle. Let the ambition be to be good and to do good. Let the honour that cometh from God be the supreme concern. And then, whether men bow or refuse to bow, the soul will be unruffled.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—14.

The very circumstance which is urged as an objection to the truth of the narrative is rather to be regarded as an evidence of its trustworthiness. The Book of Esther does not contain any record of miraculous events. There are no wonders and prodigies in it, at which infidelity might carp, and with reference to which it might say that the writer must have drawn so largely upon his fancy in some places as to render suspicious what appears to be the record of simple matters of fact. The whole tenor and style of the book indicate that the writer of it acted the part of a historian who was concerned only to relate what actually took place; and if he had been a deceiver he certainly would not have laid himself open to an objection so very palpable as that under review, when it was in his power, by the mere alterations of dates, to make the whole narrative so plausible that not a flaw could be found in it. In a word, I consider the difficulty before us as an argument for the truth of the history. But further, it must be kept in mind that though the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the month to write the decree, it does not follow that the work was finished in a day. King Artaxerxes reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, as we read in the first chapter. Diverse languages and dialects were spoken in many of these provinces. The edict was given forth, we are told, "to the rulers of every people of every province, according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language." The document had to be translated, then, into different languages, and a translation sent with the Persic original; and besides, there would, no doubt, be private communications dictated by Haman to the governors of the different provinces, containing directions as to the manner in which the bloody work was to be executed, and the spoils of the Jews disposed of; so that some considerable time would elapse before the royal decree could be sent out to the provinces. We learn, indeed, from the eighth chapter that it

was the twentieth day of the third month before Mordecai obtained permission to counteract the design of Haman; and, making allowance for distance and modes of travelling, we may suppose that the sentence against the Jews had not even reached the more remote parts of the empire when the remission of it was resolved upon. But again, and more particularly, it is very obvious that we have to regard the whole transaction here as overruled in the providence of God for the good of his people and the confusion of their enemies. It is easy to say that there is an air of improbability in the whole story, because, even with a few months' warning, the Jews would have had time to remove from the places where they were doomed to perish. But whither could they have gone? is one question. The Persian empire was so extensive that it would have been difficult for them to escape beyond its bounds and find a refuge elsewhere. Besides, how could they have fled, when no doubt there were orders issued to prevent their flight? We know that in persecuting times in France, and in our own country also, while the victims of persecution were warned that within a certain period no mercy would be shown to them, there were steps taken to prevent their escape; and even the attempt to escape was denounced as criminal. In the case which we have before us in the text the whole matter turns upon this point—that Haman got what he considered the favourable day for his enterprise fixed by a superstitious practice which he revered and believed to be infallible. Then, after this, he felt as if all were secure; and with a recklessness—or, as we might call it, an infatuation—such as there are many examples of in the perpetrators of heinous crimes, he proceeds to accomplish his purpose in a way which one would say was calculated to render it abortive, and to ruin himself.—*Davidson*.

Multitudes may have been in such a state of bondage as to make it impossible

for any great number of them to escape ; and as for others, it may have been expected and desired that some of them would leave the kingdom. But such as Mordecai, whom Haman especially wished to destroy, could not leave the kingdom, any more than Nehemiah, without permission from the king. It was also in keeping with Haman's character to cause all the anguish and horror possible to the Jews in anticipation of the dreadful slaughter. Then we must remember that a wise Providence so overruled this whole procedure as to bring to nought the plans of the Jews' enemy, and make his malignant hatred of the Jews the occasion of his ruin.—*Whedon's Commentary*.

If the chronicles of Persia thus record an intended massacre of the Jews which appals us in its extent and atrocity, the chronicles of Spain, Italy, and France contain records of massacres of Protestants which equal it in unmitigated barbarity. Let us thank God that our lot has been cast in times of comparative quiet, when the spirit of persecution and bloodshed is afraid to manifest itself ; and when the exhortation of the apostle is not rendered hard by a "reign of terror"—"Fear God, honour the king."—*McEwan*.

"Where," one is ready to ask, "will rulers find persons willing to execute such unreasonable and barbarous orders?" Executioners have seldom been wanting. Many are accustomed to do blindly whatever their superiors require, without inquiring whether it be right or wrong. Others act under the influence of fear ; while a thousand passions—selfishness, avarice, malice, envy, strife,

hatred to godliness, and the innate love of cruelty—take the opportunity of gratifying themselves under the covert of authority, and the pretext of executing its mandates.—*McCrée*.

Ver. 13. The malice of Haman could no more frustrate the ancient oracles relating to the Jews than it could pull the sun out of the firmament, and deprive the world of the light of day. "The sceptre was not to depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh should come." The Shiloh was not yet come. Judah must, therefore, continue a distinct nation, under governors that proceeded from himself. Haman's malice will be so far from finding the means of extirpating Judah, that the glory of that people, though eclipsed, must again shine forth as the morning.

Ver. 14. Haman caused the edict against the Jews to be published in the language of every people, that they might all be prepared to bear their part in the destruction of the Jews. But the enemies of Israel had one thing in view, and the God of Israel quite another. Haman intended to make the destruction of Judah as sure as possible, but God intended to make all nations attentive witnesses of his power and wisdom displayed in counteracting the designs of their enemies, and accomplishing their salvation. The effect of such an edict would be the fixing of all men's attention on the event ; and the event was to make it evident that there was no God like the God of Israel, nor any people on the earth so much the care of heaven as that nation which was held in abhorrence by Haman.—*Lattson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 15.

THE IRREGULARITIES OF HUMAN CONDITIONS.

Swiftly the grim messengers of intended death fly throughout the land. It is the proverbial and figurative statement that these posts flew faster than the cranes. We may picture the post-horses galloping from stage to stage. The post-masters took from the couriers the king's letters which proclaimed death and spoliation to all of Jewish nationality. And very soon throughout the land the sad story of this strange and murderous edict was known. It was known not only in the sorrow-darkened homes of the Jews, but also in the homes of those who were for the

present free from the fear caused by such a murderous design. And we may well suppose that there were perplexity and insecurity everywhere. The Jews were sadly troubled. The rest of the people were perplexed and insecure; for if there was no safety for these inoffensive Jews, if for them this wholesale and unrighteous slaughter, what security is there for any other portion of his Majesty's subjects? Yes, and there was perplexity in the breast of Haman, and in the heart of Ahasuerus the king. For evil doers are always evil thinkers. Those who purpose trouble for others will be troubled themselves. Haman and the king might sit down to drink, and try to drown and to forget their perplexity; but the dark shadow of wrongdoing would dog their steps, and render them uncomfortable. Happy is it for us that we live in such a country, and under such a wise government. It has its faults, but they are mere trifles when we consider the faults of Eastern despotism. Let us wisely use our privileges.

I. The inequalities of human conditions. The most striking instance of inequality is that which is illustrated between the condition of the *oppressor and the oppressed*. We do not believe in the Divine right of kings as advocated and upheld by some in the past, but there is a broad and true sense in which governments are Divine. Fear God. Honour the king. These are two injunctions binding upon men. Wise government tends to the consolidation of human society. It is for the general good that some should rule, and that others—the large majority—should be ruled. There is law in the material world. There are higher and lower in the intellectual world. There is law—the law of love—even in heaven. There must be law on earth. Where there is no law, where there is no rule, there is no liberty worthy of the name. But every blessing, every right and even Divine organization, is capable of being subverted. That which, rightly managed, is for the general good may be rendered productive of manifold evils. A true king should be the father of his people, and the type of God. A despot is the oppressor of the people, the slave-driver of the people, the robber of the people, the scourge of the race, and the type of the devil. A king may be an oppressor without being a hard-hearted monster. He may be weak, effeminate, given up to luxury, and influenced by others more cruel than himself. Such an oppressor was Ahasuerus. Haman was his evil genius. Haman was the vile master spirit in the palace plotting tremendous wrongs. Haman was the cruel serpent fascinating and deluding the weak-minded monarch, and spitting venom upon all the Jews. Here are the oppressors in Shushan the palace, dictating their murderous edicts, and yonder, scattered abroad and dispersed among the people, are the oppressed. Already we seem to hear the cries and to behold the fast-falling tears of such as are oppressed, and they appear to have no comforter. And on the side of the oppressors there is power. Power in Shushan the palace. Weakness among the scattered Jews. Royal despotism has well-nigh been swept away from the face of the earth, but still may we see, if we rightly use our eyes, this inequality of human conditions—the oppressors and the oppressed. The defeat of the South by the North in America has not abolished all slave-driving. In this free and liberty-worshipping country there is still oppression. Oh, the tears of such as are oppressed! How fast they still fall. What an ocean they make! If these tears are kept in Divine bottles, how large and how many the bottles! If these bottled tears are to confront the oppressors, they may well pray for the rocks and mountains to fall upon and hide them from the consequences of their evil doings. Let us see to it that we do the things that are just and equal. The inequality of human conditions is further illustrated by the contrast *between the jollity of the palace and the perplexity of the city*. How beautifully simple and yet how suggestive the statement: "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed." Revelry in the palace. Misery in the cottage. The wine of mirth, and jollity, and forgetfulness for the king. The wine of bitterness for his subjects. The music of pipers and harpists, of singing men and singing women, for the court. The sad, discordant

notes of wailing for a large portion of the population. The city Shushan was perplexed, and well it might be. *The indifference of one class of the community towards another and seemingly less-favoured class is brought to view in this passage.* Is a Persian state the only one where this state of things may be witnessed? Are heathen countries the only lands where we may behold this heartless indifference? No; even in Christian states class distinctions are far from being abolished. At this day, and in this country, there are revelry in high places, and want and wretchedness in low places. In this time of commercial depression, the well-to-do classes should ask, Are we only enjoying ourselves while many of our countrymen are in a state of distress? *This indifference has its root in and is the outcome of selfishness.* What did the king care for the misery of others so long as his own pleasures were not interrupted? It is a relief for us to suppose that the king was not all taken up with self. The after history shows that selfishness had not destroyed all traces of true feeling. But we find very few traces of good in poor Haman. Especially at this time, what did he care so long as revenge was glutted? All that he appeared to mind was his own personal aggrandizement. His revenge would revel in human blood. His avarice would gladly feed upon the spoil of the slaughtered. His ambition would gloat over this dreadful display of his power. Oh, this hateful selfishness! What beauty it spoils! What life it wastes! What goodness it destroys! It is an insatiate deity that requires holocausts to be offered at its shrine, and never cries, It is enough.

II. The mysteries of human conditions. The air is thick with mysteries. We move in a maze. We are lost in bewilderment. And this is one of the mysteries—the king and Haman are enjoying themselves, while there is perplexity in the city of Shushan. One man seems to pass his life in joy, and another in sorrow. Success appears to attend every step which is taken by one man, but defeat and disaster are the portion of another. He is ever struggling against adverse forces, and never appears able to come off conqueror in the contest. This is one of the mysteries that King David sought to know by intense thought. This, too, was a difficulty that beset the Psalmist—the existence of triumphant evil. It was that which vexed him, and he could not put it together. There are swindles that are sovereign, and sovereigns that are swindlers. Base men in the high places of the earth. Haman feasting with the king. Mordecai mourning at the king's gate. "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Did poor Mordecai feel envious? We cannot be hard upon him if he did. Were the thoughts of Mordecai turned in this direction? Did he, too, try to solve the mystery, and give it up as a hopeless task? Did it tend to deepen his grief and darken his hours of sorrow? And all men and women in suffering must have felt it more or less. The mystery is there; but why let it be a trouble? The mystery is there; but why not try to leave it and get into serener heights?

III. The compensating forces of human conditions. The law of compensation has more extensive ramifications than is dreamt of in the philosophy of narrow thinkers. If there be such a principle in the material world, why not in the moral world, since both are fashioned and governed by the same Author? We know not how far those are correct who tell us that happiness and misery are pretty equally distributed. This, however, is a very comfortable doctrine for those who have happiness enough themselves, and do not care to give themselves the trouble of looking after the welfare of the less fortunate. But there are compensations. The joys of the rich have their drawbacks. The sorrows of the poor are not without their alleviations. The pleasure of Ahasuerus was not a permanent stream. The glory of Haman was soon tarnished. The sorrow of Mordecai was turned into laughter. There may be hunger in the wilderness, but there is manna from heaven. There may be thirst, but there is water from the smitten rock. The waters of Marah may be bitter, but there is close by a God-given tree to sweeten.

In the journey there is a Marah, but there is further on an Elim, with its twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees.

IV. The sympathetic element in human conditions. The city Shushan was perplexed. The Jews, we may well imagine, had many sympathizers. Sorrow draws men and women more closely together than joy. It is easier to weep with those that weep than to rejoice with those that rejoice. Self-regarding considerations might cause the citizens of Shushan to be perplexed, and lead the well-disposed of the Persians to sympathize with the Jews. Perhaps even poor Ahasuerus was trying to get away from the working of a sympathetic nature as he sat down to drink. This is a compensating force when sorrow elicits sympathy. Seek to feel with and for others' woes. When one part of a city suffers, the whole of the city should be perplexed.

V. The harmonizing principle for human conditions. What principle is there that is to adjust in fit proportions the various parts and members of human society? What power must be brought to bear so that men and women may neither hurt nor destroy one another? Are communistic doctrines to be promulgated and received? Is there to be a great levelling process in society? Is Haman to be hanged on the gallows? Must Mordecai be made prime minister in his stead? Is Ahasuerus to be dethroned? Or is he to be made merely the mouthpiece and executor of a number of men who shall be supposed to be voted for by the nation in popular assemblies? Something may be done by wise methods of government. Something may be done by placing noble-minded men in high offices of the state. Something may be done by the rich being rich in good works, and being ready to distribute, and by the poor being frugal, contented, and industrious. But the only effective harmonizing principle is the gospel rightly understood, broadly interpreted, and fully received. That gospel which dethrones selfishness, and teaches the true brotherhood of humanity. That gospel which teaches to fear God, to honour the king, and all men to love one another. That gospel which preaches peace to all, both to those that are far off as well as to those that are near.

VI. The true sustaining power for all human conditions. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Let the "perplexed" of every city and of every nation endure as seeing him who is invisible. The true help in life's difficulties is to go into the sanctuary of God. Wherever there is a believing soul, there God makes a little sanctuary of glorious manifestations. By faith and prayer Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews were saved and delivered out of their perplexities. By faith and prayer the world's true heroes have ever conquered. And by the same means must men and women still prevail. Here learn—(a) *To keep away from sensuality, which hardens the nature.* Haman would keep the king drinking, so that he might be kept callous and indifferent. Strong drink blunts the fine edge of reason, darkens the understanding, and hardens the nature. (b) *To cultivate sympathy, which ennobles the nature.* Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. The law of Christ is the law of love. The fulfilment of that law is man's noblest work. The greatness of Jesus is the greatness of his loving sympathy. (c) *To foster firm faith in an over-ruling power, which brightens life.* Not faith in the overthrow of the Hamans of time, not faith in the theory that kings will see their folly, but faith in the power of One who is all-wise and all-good. (d) *To have respect unto the harmonies of heaven amid the discords of earth.* We may not live to see the day when the perplexity of Shushan will be turned into gladness, but every true soul will be ushered into and enjoy the harmonies of that city where the inhabitants are never perplexed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 15.

It is a woeful thing to see great ones quaff the tears of the oppressed, and to hear them make music of shrieks.—*Bishop Hall.*

A prince and an officer who, at the time when the inhabitants of their chief city are in the greatest consternation, when above all an entire people is thrown into mortal fear of their life, can sit down to eat and drink, manifest either an inhumanity which would easily arouse a general revolt, or an evil conscience which already foretells the failure of their plans.—*Lange.*

So to drown the noise of conscience, and so to nourish their hearts as in a day of slaughter. Thus Joseph's brethren, when they had cast him into the pit, sat down to eat bread, when it had been fitter for them to have wept for their wickedness. So did the Israelites, when they had made them a golden calf. Herod feasteth when he had cast the Baptist into prison. The anti-Christian rout revel and riot when they had slain the two witnesses. The Pope proclaimed a jubilee upon the Parisian massacre. The King of France said that he never smelled anything more sweet than the admiral's carcase, when it stank with long lying. Better is the perplexity of him that suffereth evil than the jollity of him that doeth evil.—*Trapp.*

It is an absurd and impious thing to indulge ourselves in mirth and pleasure when the Church is in distress and the public are perplexed.—*Matthew Henry.*

The cruel measure could not but fill all peace-loving citizens with horror and anxiety.—*Keil.*

Haman gives up himself to pleasure and jollity, in which he had the honour to be companion to the king. He will soon find that the end of this mirth is heaviness. The city Shushan was perplexed when the king and Haman were enjoying this merriment. What heart could be free from perplexity on such an occasion? The Jews were known to be as innocent as their neighbours. Many of them resided in the city of Shushan. The prospect of their

miserable and unmerited fate was terrible. Who could tell where such mischiefs were to end? Haman might next day petition his deluded master to compliment him with a like sacrifice of other lives. The people of Shushan at this time would be in much the same state of mind as a Persian minister of state in later times, who said that he never left the king's presence without putting his hand to his head, that he might feel whether it was still standing on his shoulders.—*Lawson.*

But what must the Jews scattered throughout the provinces of the empire have thought of this strange decree? They were not in the secret of the plot. They knew nothing of Haman's injured pride, and Mordecai's religious opposition to the king's commandment. They would regard it purely as an event in the providence of God. And how inexplicably mysterious must it have seemed to them! In their exile they had been faithful to his word, keeping themselves from the sins of surrounding heathenism, and so preserving themselves in his fear that even Haman the Agagite had nothing of which to accuse them save respect to the laws of their God. Wherefore, then, had he permitted this tremendous calamity to overshadow them? Might they not have doubted his providence? Certainly, as the Jews were at this time circumstanced, their faith in God was put to a severe test, and we may readily conclude that the ordeal through which they were now passing would either find them better or worse—more or less trustful in him who maketh the wrath of men to praise him. The common experience of God's people bears witness to similar mysterious overshadowings. They cannot account for them. When they were most devoted to his service, and most anxiously seeking his favour; when they were most strenuously battling against the world, and endeavouring to bring honour to his name; when they were expecting his blessing, and looking for good from his sovereign hand, it has often been even

then that there have come events which it was natural to interpret as signs of his displeasure, tokens of his wrath. But we are wrong interpreters of his providence beforehand, and even afterwards. The sufferer cannot understand his long illness, nor the prosperous man his sudden fall into poverty and reproach, nor the parent the anguish of repeated strokes of bereavement, nor the widow the wisdom and benevolence of her desolation and loneliness. All is dark and mysterious to them, and they may be sorely tempted to discredit the mercifulness of the Divine purpose in Providence. Of such ordeals, too, we can confidently affirm that after having passed through them they will either leave us better or worse. From the history of God's afflictive dealings in the past we may clearly gather one grand lesson—never to doubt his word, and always to have faith in his love. Job, Jacob, Daniel, David, and the Jews in Persia all teach us this lesson. At such times it is most glorifying to him, as well as comforting to ourselves, to trust in him explicitly and fully.—*McEwan*.

Self-indulgence renders men callous to the distresses and sufferings of their fellow-men. "The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed." Give the votary of sensuality or intemperance the opportunity of gratifying his craving, and he cares not what misery he may occasion to those in whose well-being he is bound to take the deepest interest. Let the sensualist have his will, and it costs him not a thought that he may be destroying the happiness of families, and ruining for time and eternity the victims of his ungodly lust. Strong carnal appetite, when it is excited, sets at defiance the law of nature as well as the law of God. One can scarcely think without shuddering of the conduct of the two men referred to in the text. They had resolved to shed innocent blood without measure ;

but they could sit down as boon companions to enjoy themselves over their wine, and could contrive to drown any remonstrances of conscience with the flowing goblet. Could there be a more thorough personification of evil in one of its most revolting forms than we have here? And yet, my friends, it finds its counterpart, although on a smaller scale, in the procedure of multitudes who live under the light of the gospel! Is that individual one whit better than the infamous pair referred to in the text who, forgetting the claims of home, and his responsibilities as a father and a husband, spends his earnings in debauchery, and thus reduces what might be a happy family to wretchedness and poverty? While he is enjoying himself with his companions, all reckless of his obligation to protect and provide for his wife and children, they are sitting in absolute want, with no prospect for the morrow but what is still more gloomy than the experience of to-day. Then, if there are any here to whom these remarks are in any respects applicable, let them bethink themselves of their sin and folly; let them judge themselves by the same rule whereby they would judge the king and Haman. Then they will acknowledge that they have been unfaithful to a sacred trust committed to them, and they will endeavour by the help of the grace of God to be no longer the destroyers, but the protectors of those whom they have solemnly vowed to protect. And let me conclude my remarks upon this part of the subject by again saying, that the excessive indulgence of any forbidden appetite makes men selfish, and regardless of the rights of others. So that, as the followers of Christ, we should all strive to keep the desires of our animal natures in subjection, else we forfeit all claim to belong to him with whom the will of his heavenly Father was paramount in everything.—*Davidson*.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1. *Look to the end.* Thus oft empty vessels swim aloft; rotten posts are gilt with adulterate gold; the worst weeds spring up bravest; and when the twins strive in Rebekah's womb, profane Esau comes forth first, and hath the primogeniture. But while they seek the greatest dignities, they mostly meet with the greatest shame; like apes, while they be climbing they the more show their deformities. They are lifted up also that they may come down again with the greater poise. It was, therefore, well and wisely spoken by Alvarez de Luna, when he told them who admired his fortune and favour with the King of Castile, You do wrong to commend the building before it be finished, and until you see how it will stand. Princes' favourites should consider with themselves that honour is but a blast, a *magnum nihil*, a glorious fancy, a rattle to still men's ambition; and that as the passenger looketh no longer upon the dial than the sun shineth upon it, so it is here.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 1. *The sympathetic traveller.* Here is something that happened on a railway train somewhere in New England last summer. A woman clad in deep mourning entered the cars at a railway station. She took a seat just in front of an inquisitive-looking, sharp-faced female. The woman in black had not been seated long before she felt a slight tap on the shoulder, and heard her neighbour ask, in a low, sympathetic tone, "Lost anybody?" A silent nod was the response. A slight pause, and then a second question: "Child?" A low shake of the head in the negative. "Parent?" A similar reply. "Husband?" This time the slight nod again. "Life insured?" A nod. "Experienced religion?" A nod. Then: "Well, well, cheer up! Life insured and experienced religion; you're all right, and so's he!" Haman's life was not insured, as the sequel of the history shows. He did not experience the saving power of religion, and therefore a small matter disturbs his happiness. Mordecai's life was insured in the best sense. No weapon formed against the Lord's anointed can prosper until the Lord's time. Those are safely kept who are kept by God.

Ver. 2. *Good principles.* A young man was in a position where his employers required him to make a false statement, by which several hundred pounds would come into their hands which did not belong to them. All depended upon this clerk's serving their purpose. To their great vexation, he utterly refused to do so. He could not be induced to sell his conscience for any one's favour. As the result, he was discharged from the place. Not long after, he applied for a vacant situation, and the gentleman, being pleased with his address, asked him for any good reference he might have. The young man felt that his character was unsullied, and so fearlessly referred him to his last employer. "I have just been dismissed from his employ, and you can inquire of him about me." It was a new fashion of getting a young man's recommendation; but the gentleman called on the firm, and found

that he was "too conscientious about trifles." The gentleman had not been troubled by too conscientious employées, and preferred that those intrusted with his money should have a fine sense of truth and honesty, so he engaged the young man, who rose fast in favour, and became at length a partner. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Even unscrupulous men know the worth of good principles that cannot be moved. The Emperor Constantius, father to Constantine the Great, once commanded all his Christian servants to offer sacrifices to the gods of Rome. If they refused to obey his command they were to be dismissed from his service. Many of them obeyed; others did not, and accordingly were dismissed. But in a day or two he turned out all those who complied with his orders, and recalled all those whom he had expelled, saying that those would be most faithful to their prince who were most faithful to their God, and that he would not trust men who were false to their religion. Mordecai was conscientious about trifles, and true to his religion. This he was whether he found favour with man or not. He looked for the favour of God. This must be the inspiring motive, for conscientious men do not always succeed, as the world reckons success. The advice of Mr. Carter—a Puritan preacher—to one of his congregation, "You must work hard, and fare hard, and pray hard," was good; but we cannot feel sure about his conclusion—"And then you will be sure to thrive." In these modern times we have certainly known some who have worked hard, and fared hard, and prayed hard all their lives, and at their death have not been able to bequeath a shilling.

Ver. 7. *Lot casting.* The old interpreter addeth in *urnam*, into the pitcher. And the new annotations tell us that, about casting lots, there was a pitcher into which papers, with names of the several months written on them, and rolled up, were cast; yea, also papers with the name of every day and of every month were cast in; then one, blindfolded, put in his hand, and pulled out a paper, and according to the marks which they had set down, such a month proved lucky, and such a day in the month; and, by God's providence, it so fell out that their supposed lucky day was on the twelfth month, whereby it came to pass that their plot was defeated before the time of accomplishing thereof.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 7. *Deciding by lot.* In nearly all cases where reason cannot decide, or where the right of several claimants to one article has to be settled, recourse is had to the lot, which "causeth contentions to cease." In the East a young man is either so accomplished, or so rich, or so respectable, that many fathers aspire to the honour of calling him son-in-law. Their daughters are said to be beautiful, wealthy, and of a good family; what is he to do? The name of each young lady is written on a separate piece of cloth, and then all are mixed together. The youth and his friends then go to the front of the temple; and

being seated, a person who is passing by at the time is called, and requested to take one of the pieces of cloth, on which a lady's name is inscribed, and place it near the anxious candidate. This being done, it is opened, and she whose name is written there becomes his wife.—*Oriental Illustrations*.

Ver. 7. *The leech and surgeon*. When a surgeon puts a leech upon a patient, his intention is to heal; the leech follows the instincts of its nature, and the two work together to produce the desired result. When Joseph's brethren sold him into Egypt, their intention was to humiliate him and to be rid of him; but it was made to serve God's intention, which was to exalt him. So Haman planned for the destruction of the Jewish people, and delayed his purpose; but it was God's purpose to save. Haman's delay hastened the purpose of God. Should we not rather say that God made use of Haman's delay to bring about his gracious purpose of deliverance to Israel and destruction to their enemies?

Ver. 5. *Trouble in every house*. Talmage says, "I passed down a street of a city with a merchant. He knew all the finest houses on the street. He said, There is something the matter in all these houses. In that one it is conjugal infelicity. In that one, a dissipated son. In that, a dissolute father. In that, an idiot child. In that, the prospect of bankruptcy." In Haman's house there was trouble. Mordecai troubled Haman. The good must ever be troublesome to the wicked.

Ver. 5. *Revenge*. The Highland chief lay a-dying in his mountain home, and in his dying heart were hard revengeful thoughts towards an opposing clan. A minister waited at his bedside, and exhorted him to forgive, assuring him of the fact that God will not forgive if we do not. And, said the chief, I will forgive them; but in almost the same breath he said to his son, that he left him a father's curse if he forgave them. Louis XII. said that nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of an enemy. The Christian's code is one of forgiveness—that nothing smells so sweet as the rescued body of an enemy. Well would it have been for Haman—well both temporally and spiritually—had he really forgiven the supposed slight of Mordecai.

Ver. 8. *The laws of the Jews*. Prosper's conceit was, that they were called Judei because they received their laws from God. And, therefore, if Demosthenes could say of laws in general that they were the invention of Almighty God; and if Cicero could say of the laws of the twelve tables in Rome that they far exceeded and excelled all the libraries of all the philosophers, how much more true was all this of the laws of the Jews, given by God, and ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator, Moses! Seneca, though he jeered the Jews for their weekly Sabbath as those that lost the seventh part of their time, yet he could not but say that, being the basest people, they had the best laws, and gave laws unto all the world. Those holy Levites acknowledge, with all thankfulness, that God had given them right judgments, true laws, good statutes and commandments, whereby he severed them from all other people, as his own peculiar; and this

was their glory wherever they came, though the sycophant Haman turneth their glory into shame, as one that loveth vanity, and sought after leasing.—*Trapp*.

Ver. 9. *Rage*. Rage is essentially vulgar, and never vulgarer than when it proceeds from mortified pride, disappointed ambition, or thwarted wilfulness. A baffled despot is the vulgarest of dirty wretches, no matter whether he be the despot of a nation vindicating its rights, or of a donkey sinking under its load.—*Hartley Coleridge*.

Ver. 9. *Wrath cured*. A valiant knight, named Hildebrand, had been injured and offended by another knight, named Bruno. Anger burned in his heart, and he could hardly wait for the day to take bloody revenge on his enemy. He passed a sleepless night, and at dawn of day he girded on his sword, and sallied forth to meet his antagonist. But as it was early he entered a chapel by the wayside, and sat down and looked on the pictures which were on the walls, lit up by the rays of the morning sun. There were three pictures. The first represented our Saviour in a purple robe of scorn before Pilate and Herod, and bore the inscription, "When he was reviled, he reviled not again." The second picture showed the scourging of Jesus, and under it was written—"Who threatened not, when he suffered." And the third was the crucifixion, with these words—"Father, forgive them." When the knight had seen these words he knelt down and prayed. Then the light of evening was more lovely to the returning knight than the light of morning had been.

Ver. 9. *The negro and his enemy*. A slave who had by the force of his sterling worth risen high in the confidence of his master, saw one day, trembling in the slave-market, a negro, whose grey head and bent form showed him to be in the last weakness of old age. He implored his master to purchase him. He expressed his surprise, but gave his consent. The old man was bought and conveyed to the estate. When there, he who had pleaded for him took him to his own cabin, placed him on his own bed, fed him at his own board, gave him water from his own cup; when he shivered, he carried him into the sunshine; when he drooped in the heat, bore him safely to the shade. What is the meaning of all this? asked a witness. Is he your father? No. Is he your brother? No. Is he your friend? No. He is mine enemy. Years ago he stole me from my native village, and sold me for a slave; and the good Lord has said, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." When put to the test of practice it will be found that very few Christians believe in inspiration. Where is the professed follower of Christ in these days who would think of following the negro's simple acceptance of an inspired injunction.

Ver. 9. *The man who killed his neighbours*. The Americans have a tract on this subject. It contains, in the form of a narrative, many useful practical suggestions on the art of overcoming evil with good. It is with kindness—modest, thoughtful, generous, persevering, unwearied

kindness—that the benevolent countryman kills his churlish neighbour; and it is only the old evil man that he kills, leaving the new man to lead a very different life in the same village after the dross has been purged away. If any one desires to try this work, he must bring to it at least these two qualifications—modesty and patience. If he proceed ostentatiously, with an air of superiority, and a consciousness of his own virtue, he will never make one step of progress. But even though the successive acts of kindness should be genuine, the operator must lay his account with a tedious process and many disappointments. Many instances of good rendered for evil may seem to have been thrown away, and no symptom of penitence appear in the countenance or conduct of the evil-doer; but he not weary in this well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not. Although your enemy has resisted your deeds of kindness even unto seventy times seven, it does not follow that all or that any one of these has been lost.—*Arnol.*

Ver. 9. *Clive and his moderation.* When our great Eastern conqueror, Clive, was accused in Parliament of having amassed too much during the period of his conquests, he boldly said, "Why, when I think of that treasure, and see the hills of gold and silver here, and the jewels there, I declare I am astonished at my own moderation." Haman offered a large sum of money to Ahasuerus—a large sum, whether the 10,000 talents he reckoned according to the Mosaic shekel, £3,750,000, or according to the civil shekel, £1,875,000. But the wealth of the prime minister of that vast country must have been great. Doubtless the Jews then, as now, would be a people given to the accumulation of wealth and property, and he would see that he would be no loser by the bargain. He would confiscate the property of the slaughtered Jews, and thus enrich himself by the transaction. It seemed an opportunity most favourable for wreaking his revenge and enriching himself and the state. Haman's large offer is *moderation* itself when we think of all the consequences of his proposal. The destruction of a whole people, much trouble in the kingdom, and the confiscation of vast wealth.

Ver. 13. *The deliverance of Hubert de Burgo.* We read in our Chronicles, that when King Henry III. had given commandment for the apprehending of Hubert de Burgo, earl of Kent, he fled into a church in Essex. They to whom the business was committed, finding him upon his knees before the high altar, with the sacrament in one hand, and a cross in the other, carried him away, nevertheless, unto the Tower of London. The bishop, taking this to be a great violence and wrong to the Church, would never leave the king until he had caused the earl to be carried back to the place whence he was fetched. This was done; and although order was taken he should not escape thence, yet it gave the king's wrath a time to cool, and himself leisure to make proof of his innocence; by reason whereof he was afterwards restored to the king's favour, and former places of honour. And the like befell these Jews ere the thirteenth of

Adar; but Haman, blinded with pride and superstition, could not foresee it.—*Trapp.*

Ver. 13. *Soldiers, not butchers.* At the famous Bartholomew's massacre, when the King of France sent his orders to the commanders in the different provinces to massacre the Huguenots, one of them returned him this answer: "In my district your Majesty has many brave soldiers, but no butchers." That virtuous governor never felt any effects of the royal resentment. It is to be feared that few of the Persian governors would have given such proofs of virtuous courage if the king's edict had not been reversed. We find none of all the governors of the provinces of the Babylonian empire that refused to bow their knees to the graven image which Nebuchadnezzar the king set up. The subjects of princes who rule with unlimited dominion are for the most part slaves both in body and in soul. They are taught from their earliest days, by the examples which they see around them, to consider their princes as gods on earth, whose will must not be disputed.—*Lawson.*

Ver. 14. *Executioners.* There is abundance of evidence that, in the middle ages, the office of public executioner was esteemed highly honourable all over Germany. It still is, in such parts of that country as retain the old custom of execution by stroke of sword, very far from being held discreditable to the extent to which we carry our feelings on the subject, and which exposed the magistrates of a Scotch town,—I rather think no less a one than Glasgow,—to a good deal of ridicule, when they advertised, some few years ago, on the occasion of the death of their hangman, that "none but persons of respectable character" need apply for the vacant situation. At this day, in China, in Persia, and probably in other Oriental kingdoms, the Chief Executioner is one of the great officers of state, and is as proud of the emblem of his fatal duty as any European Lord Chamberlain of his golden key.—*Note to Anne of Geierstein.*

No doubt very many of the subjects of Ahasuerus would be willing to become executioners, in order to secure the favour of the monarch, and to get a share of the spoil. They would get themselves ready against that day of intended slaughter.

Ver. 15. *A love of books and want.* In one of our large manufacturing centres a working man, with a love of books, had managed with great economy to collect together so many as 150 volumes; and all these had to be sold to meet the necessities of nature. One volume was highly valued. When he did not want the money he could have sold the book for a sovereign, but when starvation came the precious treasure had to be sold for one shilling. That one book tells a sad tale of suffering to those who can catch its silent message. In contrast, we may read of the eleventh edition of a modern book published at thirty shillings. And what is even this to the large sums spent in splendidly bound and illustrated copies of poets and artists? And what is even this when we hear of a lady of high rank selling a marriage present—consisting of a mag-

nificent tiara of diamonds, which cost £13,000—in order to defray the cost of sinful extravagance, while many of our countrymen are in starvation? “The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.” We are thankful for the displays of liberality in our country; but still too many in this land sit down to drink while a vast multitude are perplexed.

Ver. 15. *The surgical operation.* In one of our London hospitals a poor man was about to undergo a surgical operation. The anaesthetic was administered, but while it rendered him insensible to pain, it did not lessen his power of hearing and observing. Around him were assembled a number of young medical men. One half were opposed to the operation, and said, The man will die in our hands; but the other said, What a stroke of business it will be if the operation is successfully performed; it will make our fortunes! Selfishness ruled; the operation was performed. The poor man heard the pleading of selfishness, and said, It ought not to have been done; I shall never get better; and in a few days he expired. It is most likely the disease would have killed him, but is that any excuse for this stroke of selfish policy? We give all praise to the members of the medical profession, but we must not ignore its defects. But oh, this selfishness is common to all. What waste of precious life has selfishness incurred! Haman is not the only one who drinks at the expense of the suffering of others.

Ver. 15. *The prosperity of the wicked.* Would it not be accounted folly in a man that is heir to many thousands per annum that he should envy a stage-player clothed in the habit of a king, and yet not heir to one foot of land? who, though he have the form, respect, and apparel of a king or nobleman, yet is at the same time a very beggar, and worth nothing. Thus wicked men, though they are arrayed gorgeously, and fare deliciously, wanting nothing, and having more than heart can wish, yet they are but only possessors; the godly Christian is the heir. What good doth all their prosperity do them? It doth but hasten their ruin, not their reward. The labouring ox is longer lived than the ox that is put into the pasture—the very putting of him there doth but hasten his slaughter; and when God puts wicked men into fat pastures, into places of honour and power, it is but to hasten their ruin. Let no man, therefore, fret himself because of evil-doers, nor be envious at the prosperity of the wicked; for the candle of the wicked shall be put out into everlasting darkness, they shall soon be cut off, and wither as a green herb.—*Spencer.*

Parable of the hog and the horse. “After these events.” What events? After God had created the remedy before the infliction of the wound; after Mordecai had saved the king’s life before the orders for the destruction of his people were promulgated. After these events the king

advanced Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, to an illustrious position in the kingdom. He was raised, however, but to be destroyed. His destiny was like to that of the hog in the parable of the horse, the colt, and the hog. A certain man possessed a horse, a colt, and a hog. For the two former he measured out daily a certain amount of food—so much was their allowance, no more, no less; the hog, however, was allowed to eat according to his own pleasure. Said the colt to the horse, “How is this? Is it just? We work for our food, while the hog is a useless animal; surely we should have as much to eat as is given to him.” “Wait,” answered the horse, “and you will soon see, in the downfall of the hog, the reason.” With the coming of the autumn the hog was killed. “See,” said the horse, “they did not give the hog so much to eat for his own benefit, but in order to fatten him for the killing.”—*Talmud.*

Ver. 15. *Different disposal of blessings.* When a prince bids his servants carry such a man down into the cellar, and let him drink of the beer and wine, this is a kindness from so great a personage to be valued highly; but for the prince to set him at his own table, and let him drink of his own wine, this, no doubt, is far more. Thus it is that God gives unto some men great estates, abundance of corn, and wine, and oil; yet, in so doing, he entertains them but in the common cellar. But for his people they have his right-hand blessings; he bestows his graces on them, beautifies them with holiness, makes them to drink of the rivers of his pleasures, and means to set them by him at his own table with himself in heavenly glory.—*Spencer.*

Ver. 15. *Ulysses and the Syrens.* We may read that Ulysses, when he was to pass the coast of the Syrens, caused his men to stop their ears, that they might not be enchanted by their music to destroy themselves; but for himself he would only be bound to the mast, that though he should hear, yet their musical sounds might not be so strong as to allure him to overthrow himself by leaping into the sea. Thus there are some of God’s people that are weak in faith, so that when they see God’s outward proceedings of providence seemingly contrary to his promises, they are apt to be charmed from their own steadfastness. It were therefore good for them to stop their ears, and to shut their eyes to the works, and look altogether to the word of God. But for those that are strong, in whom the pulse of faith beats more vigorously, they may look upon the outward proceedings of God; yet let them be sure to bind themselves fast to the mast—the word of God—lest when they see the seeming contrariety of his proceedings to the promise, they be charmed from their own steadfastness, to the wounding of their own most precious souls, and weakening the assurance of their eternal salvation.—*Spencer.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. Perceived all that was done] Evident that Mordecai knew not only the terms of the public proclamation, but the particulars of the private arrangement between Haman and the king. For in ver. 7 it is said, "And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them." **Put on sackcloth with ashes]** An abbreviated combination, meaning that he put on a hairy garment and spread ashes upon his head in sign of deep grief. To rend one's clothes in grief was as much a Persian as a Jewish practice. When tidings of Xerxes' defeat at Salamis reached Shushan, all the people "rent their garments and uttered unbounded shouts and lamentations."—*Herod.* viii. 99. פָּרַח an intensified form of expression, similar to the Latin *conquestus*, violent complaint, earnest and vociferous demonstration. **2.]** The king's gate was the free place before the entrance to the royal palace. Further he could not go, for it was not permitted to bear the semblance of an evil omen before the king. **3.]** The sorrow was general. All the Jews broke out into mourning, weeping, and lamentation, while many manifested their grief in the manner described. **4, 5.]** The matter was made known to Esther by her maids and eunuchs; and she fell into convulsive grief. The verb here used is a passive intensive—to be affected with grief as one seized with the pains of delivery. She sent clothes to her guardian, that he might put them on, doubtless, that thereby he might again stand in the gate of the king, and so relate to her the cause of his grief. But he refused them, not only because he would wear no other than garments of mourning, but because he desired a private opportunity to communicate with her. Mordecai accomplished his object, and Hatach the eunuch was sent to him to obtain particulars.—*Lange*. **What it was, and why it was]** lit. what this, and why this? She had not been informed of this terrible decree. **6. The street of the city]** The broad open place before the palace.—*Whedon's Commentary*. **7. The sum of the money]** Rather a statement of the silver. The word here rendered *sum* means a distinct or accurate statement. Mordecai told Hatach what had befallen him, and gave him also a statement of the silver Haman had promised to bring into the king's treasury. "This promise of Haman is here emphatically mentioned as the chief point not so much for the purpose of raising the indignation of Esther to the highest pitch (*Bertheau*), as to show the resentment and eagerness with which Haman had urged the extermination of the Jews."—*Keil*. **8. The copy of the writing of the decree]** may very probably refer to the contents of the writing of the decree; possibly Mordecai had noted down the substance of that decree. **To make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people]** To entreat, supplicate for something diligently. She should petition relief for her people. "A perilous undertaking to urge upon her. But Mordecai's faith already began to discern a Divine reason for her elevation in the kingdom at that time (see ver. 14)."—*Whedon's Commentary*. **11. The inner court]** The court that faced the principal audience hall—the throne chamber—where alone it would be practicable for Esther to see the king on such business. In the time of Deioceses the Mede, approach to the king was already very difficult; and among the Persians, with very few exceptions, no one was permitted to approach the king without a notice. As to the golden sceptre, Rawlinson observes—"A modern critic asks, 'Is it likely that a Persian king would always have a golden sceptre by him to stretch out towards intruders on his privacy?' It seems enough to reply that in all the numerous representations of Persian kings at Persepolis, there is not one in which the monarch does not hold a long tapering staff (which is probably the sceptre of Esther) in his right hand." Esther's difficulty arose from the fact that she had not been called to come in unto the king for thirty days. She did not feel quite sure of her position. To venture unsummoned might be to prejudice the cause. **13.]** Mordecai does not reproach Esther with being indifferent to the fate of her fellow-countrymen, but rather calls her attention to the fact that her own life is in danger. **14.]** Who knows, if thou hadst not attained to royalty at or for such a time? may be taken as the translation of the latter part of this verse. The other place may refer to another agent of God in contrast with Esther; but thus it refers ultimately to Divine interposition. And although neither God nor God's assurances are here mentioned, still, as is justly remarked by Brenz, "We have this noble and clearly heroic faith of Mordecai, which sees the future deliverance, even amidst the most immediate and imminent danger." **15, 16.]** Esther resolves to go to the king unsummoned and begs a three days' fast. "Though God and prayer are not here mentioned, it is yet obviously assumed that it was before God that the Jews were to humble themselves, to seek his help, and to induce him to grant it."—*Bertheau*. **The three days, night and day]** are not to be reckoned as three times twenty-four hours, but to be understood of a fast which lasts till the third day after that on which it begins; for, according to ver. 1, Esther goes to the king on the third day. The last words, **If I perish, I perish.** &c.] are the expression not of despair, but of resignation, or perfect submission to the providence of God. **17. And Mordecai went his way]** i.e. from the place before the court of the king, to do what the queen had commanded him to do.—*Keil*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1—4.

GREAT SORROW.

A TRAGIC interest attaches to the man who is the subject of great sorrow. We are drawn towards him by the power of sympathy. He is lifted out of the common herd, and his individuality becomes at once more apparent and more prominent. Job is one of those characters that stand out most conspicuously in ancient story. His name is the most frequently mentioned, and the most widely known. Job is a very byword, and is as familiar in our mouths as household words, yea, it is a household word itself. And why is this? It is, we presume, not merely on account of his great patience under suffering, but on account of those varied and dark sorrows through which he passed. The patriarch Jacob is to us more luminous, more human, more fragrant, and more attractive, when tempest-tossed by trouble, when crushed by sorrow, than when luxuriating in the land of Goshen. The centre point of interest in the history of Abraham is when he is called upon to offer up his son Isaac. David is never sublimer than when in the intensity of his anguish he mourns the slaughter of his wayward son Absalom. And Mordecai is to us grander and more endearing when clothed in his hairy garment and with ashes on his head, indicative of his grief, than when he was arrayed in royal apparel, and the crown royal was placed on his head, and he rode forth on the king's own horse. Mordecai's loud and bitter cry of sorrow touches humanity more deeply than the proclamation of Haman, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." But if such interest attaches to the individual in sorrow, what shall be said of a nation in mourning? A whole nation weeping and wailing. Throughout that vast empire, in all its towns and villages, might be seen Jews clothed with sackcloth and sitting in ashes. National joy is attractive, but national sorrow has a more solemn interest. Sublimely and solemnly grand is the aspect of Nineveh mourning and fasting, as one man, for its sins. But these poor Jews were weeping and wailing on account of a threatened slaughter which was undeserved. Let us come near to the man and the nation thus under the dark shadow of threatened evil.

I. Sorrow cannot be prevented. Sibbes says, "None ever hath been so good or so great as could raise themselves so high as to be above the reach of troubles." And Watson observes in the same strain, "The present state of life is subject to afflictions, as a seaman's life is subject to storms. 'Man is born to trouble;' he is heir-apparent to it; he comes into the world with a cry, and goes out with a groan." This paragraph is a forcible illustration of these truths. Goodness is personified in Mordecai. Goodness combined with greatness are personified in Esther the queen. Earthly greatness is personified in the king. He was so great that the emblems of sorrow are not permitted to come nearer than the king's gate. And there were varying degrees of goodness and of greatness among the Jewish people, and yet all were subject to sorrow. The very goodness of Mordecai was the cause of his trouble. The tender, gentle goodness of Esther the queen was the reason why she was "intensely grieved." The king's gate might be closed against the entrance of those wearing the garb of sorrow. But sorrow itself can overleap the loftiest barriers, and find a way through the strongest bulwarks. Sorrow darkens the cottage and the palace. The merry laugh and prattle of childhood in sweet country homes are hushed in the presence of this great on-coming calamity. Lovers forget their new-found joy as they think of the national trouble. The harps are hung on the willows, and the children of Zion weep as they feel that the hands of the persecutors are strong. Mordecai's loud and bitter cry is heard in the palace,

and mingles itself with the music of pipers and harpists. The bright and cheery countenance of Esther wears an unwonted gloom.

II. Sorrow cannot be explained. Of course we may give the explanation that sin is the cause of sorrow in its general and broad aspect. But when we come to particularize we find ourselves at fault. Easy it is for us now to see the mistakes made by Job's friends in trying to account for his great troubles; but if Job's friends had kept silent and lived till the present time they would most likely be found to be as wise as their critics. It is not so very difficult to be wise after the event. But sorrows even after they have passed and have done their blessed work cannot always be explained. Eternity is the only true and complete interpreter of time. Heavenly joys only can make plain the meaning of earthly sorrows. Why should Mordecai suffer? What is the purpose of his present distress? Why should intense grief shake and toss the fair nature of the virtuous Esther? Why should many hearts be troubled that are the shrines of truth, of beauty, and of goodness? In the light of history and of God's providential dealings we may now offer an explanation; but while the facts of history are being enacted, while God's providential dealings are in operation, the troubled hearts are sorely perplexed. Mordecai's cry was the cry of grief, but was it not also the cry of baffled endeavour to understand the mystery? Our particular sorrows cannot at present receive definite explanation. The seed can only be properly explained by the harvest. The seed of our present sorrows can only be properly explained by the consequent harvest of eternal joys.

III. Sorrow cannot be hidden. It does not appear that Mordecai strove to hide his sorrow. Some assert that he gave vent to his sorrow in order to attract notice, and to get an audience with Esther. Difficult to say how far this suggestion is correct. Certainly Mordecai's patriotism and goodness would lead him to feel deeply the present position of his people. He could not help the manifestation of his grief. Stoics might say, Keep your sorrows to yourself; do not parade your griefs; do not be ever showing the bleeding sores of your wounded heart. But poor Mordecai could not carry out the stony lessons of these stern teachers. Emotion is as much a part of our God-given nature as intellect. The man who does not feel is a man with the better part of manhood destroyed. And feeling must sooner or later find an expression. These people were demonstrative. The English are not demonstrative. They are said to take their very pleasures sadly. They are comparatively silent about their sorrows. But it can even be found out when an Englishman is in trouble. The cry of wounded hearts may be silent, but it is penetrating. The fragrance of crushed spirits is pungent and powerful. It is better not to hide our sorrows. Trouble concealed is trouble increased. Sorrow caged up and confined is the breeder of much mischief. If earth closes her kingly gates against the cry of our sorrows, heaven opens wide its pearly gates, and as soon as ever the cry passes inside those gates it is changed into laughter.

IV. Sorrow cannot be confined. It passes from nature to nature. It travels from home to home. Even when men and women are not personally affected by that which is the cause of the sorrow, yet they feel its influence, and are sad. Go into the house where death has entered; see all the family in tears, and your nature is at once softened and subdued. It was natural to expect that all the Jews should be affected with sorrow for a common calamity threatened. But the maids and the eunuchs participated in the grief. And Esther, though ignorant of the reason for the sorrow, was intensely grieved. This community of feeling, this wonderful susceptibility to sorrow, speaks to us of our brotherhood. We are members one of another.

V. But sorrow can be mitigated. It may not be in our power to remove sorrow, but it may be so mitigated as not to crush and destroy. It may be mitigated, yea, removed—(a) By believing *that the threatened trouble may never come*. The trouble which Mordecai and these Jews feared never came. They had good

reason for fear and for sorrow. Many of our fears are without foundation. Many of the troubles we fear may never come. Why weep over ideal troubles? Let us keep our tears till the sorrow is present. Do not let us go out to meet the enemy in our present weakness. (b) By believing *that God knows how to effect a deliverance*. Mordecai's trouble was not the mere fancy of a disordered brain. The trouble was there. The edict had gone forth. The death-warrant was signed and sealed. To all human appearance Mordecai was as much a doomed man as the criminal fettered in his cell and waiting the hour of his execution. But God worked out for him and all the Jews a wonderful deliverance. Mordecai's God still reigns, and can still work for the deliverance of the oppressed. (c) By believing *that sorrow may be rendered productive*. In this case the sorrow was the means of *bringing about deliverance*. The sorrow of Mordecai and of these Jews was one of the methods employed by God to work out the deliverance of his chosen people. Your sorrows may work out your deliverance. The sorrows of an Egyptian bondage may lead you to desire and to attain to the joys of the promised land. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." Salvation here mentioned is the highest and most complete deliverance. Sorrow may be the means of *bringing about enlargement*. Not enlargement merely in the sense of respiration, as the word is employed in this chapter as a translation of Mordecai's declaration, but enlargement in the sense of *development*. Sorrow is a great developing agency when rightly received, and when blessed by the Holy Spirit of God. Mordecai's sorrow developed his nature, enlarged his sympathies, and increased his power of vision. Sorrow sometimes makes people selfish. They nurse their sorrows like mothers fondle their sickly babies. They think of nothing but of themselves and their troubles. This, however, is not the proper effect, is not the designed purpose of sorrow. It should open up the whole nature. It should expand all the powers, both intellectual and moral, of a man's being. As the waters of the Nile overflow the surrounding country, and open up the soil, and prepare it for the reception of the rice seed; so the waters of our sorrows should overflow and open up the otherwise barren soil of our natures, and prepare it for the reception of the seed of all truth in its manifold bearings. Let sorrow do its perfect work of developing. Sorrow seems to say in mournful measures to all its children, "Be ye also enlarged." It touches to finer and broader issues. It should bring out the latent powers and forces of suffering humanity. It should develop into strength and Christlike nobility and manliness. The developing power of sorrow is brought out by the apostle when he tells us that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." See to it that such is the blessed fruit of sorrow's operation. Sorrow should be productive in another sense. It should *intensify the appreciative faculty*, and set our souls longing for the pure realms where sorrows will be all unknown because they will be no longer required. Hunger is the best sauce. The sorrows of time prepare us to receive the joys of heaven. When there is intense thirst there can be nothing more refreshing than a drink of clear, sparkling spring water. The sorrows of our pilgrimage intensify the soul's thirst for the consolations of the gospel and of God's promises, and for the abiding comforts of the celestial home. The hart pants for the water-brooks. The poor soul hunted and harried by the fierce dogs of trouble pants for the earthly sanctuary, and much more for the heavenly sanctuary. Mordecai in his trouble looked to Esther, and looked still higher, for he expected enlargement and deliverance from another place. We may look to earth. We must make use of all legitimate earthly means. But we must look for true enlargement and deliverance from another place. What place is that but the throne of God, the mercy-seat, the Father's house. In that house sorrow will be turned into joy, weeping into laughter, crying into songs of gladness, and pain into perpetual and unsullied pleasure.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—4.

2. *For none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.*—Behold, they that wear softs are in kings' houses, and those that are altogether set upon the merry pin. Jannes and Jambres, those jugglers, are gracious with Pharaoh, when Moses and Aaron are frowned upon. Baal's prophets are fed at Jezebel's table, when Elias is almost pined in the desert. The dancing damsel trippeth on the toe, and triumpheth in Herod's hall, when the rough-coated Baptist lieth in cold irons; and Christ's company there is neither cared for nor called for, unless it be to show tricks and do miracles for a pastime. The kings and courtiers of Persia must see no sad sight, lest their mirth should be marred, and themselves surprised with heaviness and horror. But if mourners might not be suffered to come to court, why did those proud princes so sty up themselves, and not appear abroad for the relief of the poor oppressed.—*Trapp.*

In the case of Mordecai, the first effect of the proclamation was bitter anguish, for his conduct had been the flint out of which the spark leaped to kindle this portentous conflagration. Not for a moment would we doubt the rightness of that conduct, for his way had been hedged in by the providence of God on the one side, and the precept of God on the other; but this, while it eased his conscience, would only drive the sword deeper into his heart. He "rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; and came even before the king's gate." But Mordecai's grief did not upset his judgment. The genuine sorrow of an honest soul very seldom has that effect; and this man's greatness comes out in his deliberateness. To see him rushing out into the streets and up to the palace gate clothed in sackcloth, and filling the air with shrieks and groans, you might fancy that his reason had been thrown off its balance; but Mordecai knew very well where he was running to, and how

far he must make his cry reach. It soon appeared that he had made a copy of the edict and brought it with him, that he had informed himself as to the details of the blood-money, and that he had thought out and fixed in his own mind what must be done. Faith too, as well as sound judgment, may be discerned under this good man's grief. Certainly the cloud was very black, but he had found out a thinner place, if not a rift, in it. "In the way of obeying God I have exposed my people to this fearful peril; but, on the other hand, God has these four years and more established my foster child next to the throne. Putting these two things together, I am surely not wrong in judging that they point to the place where the cloud will yet part and greater light come through it." It was precisely the latent force of piety that gave Mordecai courage enough to set aside every thought of his own safety, to make the most public exhibition of his grief, to go straight towards the supreme earthly power. No doubt he had already gone to the supreme power in heaven; but those who have done that are not found folding their hands in the time of trouble. Moses erred when he said to the people, "Stand still," in front of the Red Sea; God told him that up to even such a barrier and through it his people must march. "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." Mordecai had learned this lesson, and now taught it to Esther.—*A. M. Symington.*

And weeping and wailing.—This was the way to get in with God, though they might not come crying to the court. Oh, the Divine rhetoric and omnipotent efficacy of penitent tears! Weeping hath a voice. Christ turned to the weeping women when going to his cross and comforted them. He showed great respects to Mary Magdalene, that weeping vine; she had the first sight of the revived phoenix (though so bleared that she could scarce discern him), and held him fast by those

feet which she had once washed with her tears, and wherewith he had lately trod upon the lion and adder.—*Trapp.*

In sad thoughts did Mordecai spend his heart, while he walked mournfully in sackcloth before that gate wherein he was wont to sit; now his habit bars his approach; no sackcloth might come within the court. Lo! that which is welcomest in the court of heaven is here excluded from the presence of this earthly royalty: "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."—*Bishop Hall.*

It is well remarked by Henry, in his commentary upon this passage, that "although nothing but what was gay and pleasant must appear at court, and everything that was melancholy must be banished thence, yet it was vain thus to keep out the badges of sorrow unless they could withal have kept out the causes of sorrow, and to forbid sackcloth to enter unless they could have forbidden sickness and trouble and death to enter." We are reminded by these words of the well-known saying of John Knox to the ladies of Queen Mary's court, when he had been dismissed from her presence with marks of high displeasure, and was waiting to hear the result of his interview with her: "O, fair ladies, how pleasing were this life of yours if it should ever abide, and then in the end that we may pass to heaven with all this gay gear. But fie upon that knave, death, that will come whether we will or not." But it is not to those only who dwell in palaces that our application of the text may be made. People in exalted stations among ourselves, people who might be expected to act more rationally than heathen potentates and nobles were accustomed to do, often exhibit the same desire to have removed out of their sight everything that would remind them of their frailty and mortality, as if in this way they could put trouble and mortality away from them. But this is unavailing. The unwelcome heralds of death, in the varied forms of disease, will find their way into the mansions of the great as well as into the humble dwellings of the poor; and at length the enemy himself will appear

all unceremoniously to drag away from their luxuries and their selfish enjoyments those who have no portion but in the present life. What I would say here then is, would it not be the best course for all to have their minds directed towards the reality which must overtake them whether they will or not; and to avail themselves of the means which God has provided in the gospel to strip death of its terrors?—*Davidson.*

Could Mordecai have been permitted to redeem his countrymen from the avenging sword, he would have rejoiced in "offering himself upon the sacrifice of their faith," and have gone to the scaffold, or the furnace, or the lions' den, clothed in white, with garlands bound round his temples, and with the song of triumph in his mouth. But he knew that his enemy would have refused this as a "kindness and a precious oil," which, instead of breaking his head, would have refreshed and exhilarated his wounded spirit. His grief was that not only he, but his people were sold "to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." But, besides, Mordecai had to reflect that he had been instrumental in bringing this calamity upon his people by refusing the honours claimed by Haman. This could not fail to give him pain, and to aggravate the evil which he deplored. Not that he repented of what he had done, for we find him afterwards persisting in the same line of conduct, and refusing to propitiate the haughty favourite by giving him the marks of reverence. We may innocently, or in the discharge of what we owe to God, do what may be the means of injuring both ourselves and others whom we love. It does not follow from this that we ought to have acted otherwise. But still it is a painful reflection. And it was a great addition to the affliction of Mordecai that the Jews were to be sacrificed in consequence of his having incurred the hatred of a wicked but powerful individual. This also accounts for his grief being more poignant than that of Esther.—*McCrie.*

Poor Mordecai had it not in his power to confine his anguish to his own bosom, or to his own house. He published it

through all the city of Shushan. You need not ask for what reasons persons overwhelmed with grief do not inquire what purpose the publication of their grief may serve. The strong impulse of sorrow often makes them publish their complaints to the winds or the trees. Yet who knows what good end it might serve to announce the unmerited calamity of the Jews through the whole city of

Shushan. There might be some compassionate hearts amongst the people that would be interested by such a dire calamity; and though the people had no direct access to the king, yet they could present their supplications to the counsellors who saw his face; or if nothing could be gained, nothing could be lost by men already doomed to death. —*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 4.

THE ACTION OF SYMPATHY REJECTED.

Change of place is not necessarily change of state. Wherever we travel we remain essentially the same. We cannot lose our identity. Foreign travel, change of scene, alteration of position, may do much to benefit the man or the woman both physically, intellectually, and morally. But these changes cannot radically change the nature. The benefit is often only temporary, and we soon relapse into our old condition. Esther the orphan had her troubles, but she did not become superior to trouble when she became Esther the queen. The royal Esther had troubles which were not possible to the uncrowned Esther. Let us seek, not to be free from trouble by change of place, or by alteration of outward condition, but to be fortified in the inward condition so that we may bear trouble in Christlike fashion.

I. Bad news. "So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her." Bad news travels fast and far. Esther was soon told of Mordecai's great trouble. The bearers of evil tidings cannot be welcome messengers. Some gladly carry evil tidings through the promptings of a depraved nature. Such ought not to be received. Their mouths ought to be shut by tokens of disapproval. The listeners to evil stories are almost as much to blame as the tellers. In this case, however, we have no just reason to suppose that there was any evil design; yea, we may rather and legitimately suppose a good purpose. Esther's maids must have known of the relationship that existed between her and Mordecai; and we may well imagine that they carried the evil tidings to see if anything could be done to alleviate Mordecai's distress. Let us be slow to be the bearers of bad news. See to it that our information is correct. Examine our purpose in telling the dismal tale. And then, when we see that the tale must be told, pray for grace and wisdom that it may be told in the best possible manner.

II. Consequent grief. "Then was the queen exceedingly grieved." The poet tells us, "And he who meditates on others' woes shall in that meditation lose his own." He may lose his own, but he gets fresh trouble by entering sympathetically into the woes of the other. We can only bear another's burdens of trouble by becoming troubled ourselves. How can we weep with those that weep unless we share their sorrows? To attend to the troubles of others is both to lessen and to increase our own troubles. Shall we then shut our ears to the cries of sorrow? No; for the consideration of the troubles of others may reconcile us to the pains of our own condition. There is to the true heart a sweet luxury in tasting the bitter cup of other people's sorrows. And benevolence, not inordinate self-love, should be the rule of life. The outward and the inward are closely and marvellously connected. Place together the words "told it her," "exceedingly grieved." The words of the maids acted powerfully on Esther's sensitive and loving nature. So it was with Job. After the messengers had told him of the slaughter of his cattle, his servants, and his children, then he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon

the ground, and worshipped. Esther, however, did not know that Mordecai's calamity was her own, and yet she was exceedingly grieved. Oh, these words! One is ready to say, Would that I had not been endowed with the power of speech! These words carry untold joy on their wings. What treasures they embody! But oh, what sorrows they produce! A word may change a destiny. Guilty or not guilty may mean life or death. These maids were no eloquent orators. They told a simple tale, and the queen was exceedingly grieved. They might well recoil from the effects of their own speech. It was not the style of the composition, but the subject matter of the discourse that produced the effect. Let preachers and speakers look to the matter as well as the manner. There was preparedness on the part of Esther. She loved Mordecai, and so was exceedingly grieved when the maids told her the story. Preparedness on the part of the hearer tends to make the speaker eloquent and successful. A Demosthenes could not have made Haman feel for Mordecai's great trouble. A simple maid can send Esther into paroxysms of convulsive grief.

III. The resulting sympathetic action. "She sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him." Royalty weeps; that is interesting and commendable. Royalty weeps on hearing the account of the sorrows of one of the subjects; that is still more commendable. Royalty bends itself to try and remove the trouble, and that is most commendable. A queen should be the mother of her people. Esther was a motherly queen, and sought by gentle nursing to remove the pains of the sick and troubled Mordecai. *Sympathy should be practical.* Tears are good, but tears that do not flow to water and nourish noble purposes, and practical efforts for the good of others, will be like the streams that flow to deaden life, and to produce miserable petrifications. These maids were successful preachers. The bearers went forth to do good. Many preachers preach for years and not one Esther is found to go forth and remove the sackcloth from the Mordecais. Practicalness is the want of the age. A little more of wise utilitarianism is needed in the present day. Preachers to tell the story simply of the world's troubles; Esthers to hear the story sympathetically, and then not to go home to their play, their luxuries, and their pleasures, but to visit the Mordecais, and if this be not possible, to send goodly raiment to those clothed in sackcloth. *Sympathy should be guided by wise discretion.* Esther did not understand all the case, and she committed an error. But while we condemn, let us remember that she did what she could. And even mistaken workers will not lose their reward if the work is done from a right motive. A new raiment cannot remove sorrow. The tailor cannot minister to a mind diseased. The dressmaker cannot root out the deep-seated sorrow of the brain, that is, not as a mere dressmaker. Harm may then be done by acting according to mere sympathetic impulses. In benevolent enterprises there must be the exercise of the judgment. A new raiment may be a disastrous gift as well as useless. And the receiver of the gift may not be as wise as Mordecai. The latter rejected the offer, but the former may clutch at the present to his own damage.

IV. The strange but wise rejection. "But he received it not." There are circumstances under which gifts may be wisely refused, and this was one of those occasions. Strange at first sight that Mordecai should refuse Esther's loving offer of help. If he felt that sorrow was better than laughter, he might have taken the raiment of joy to show his grateful appreciation of Esther's consideration. What an ungrateful and unseemly course of conduct! would Haman have exclaimed had he heard of the case. Just like that surly dog Mordecai, who would not bow to me as I passed. But Mordecai had a wise reason for his course. He had a purpose in view. The true cause of his sorrow must be made known to Esther. He was grateful to Esther, but he must still be stern in order to bring her up to the point of self-sacrifice and heroic daring. Self-interest and the feeling of affection must not be allowed to stand in the way of duty. We have seen that Mordecai loved Esther, but we now see that he would forego her love and even treat her

rudely at the call of patriotism. Love of kindred must be subordinated to the love of duty.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 4.

The perpetual intelligences that were closely held betwixt Esther and Mordecai could not suffer his public sorrows to be long concealed from her. The news of his sackcloth afflicts her ere she can suspect the cause; her crown doth but clog her head while she hears of his ashes. True friendship transforms us into the condition of those we love; and, if we cannot raise them to our cheerfulness, draws us down to their dejection. Fain would she uncase her foster father of these mournful weeds, and change his sackcloth for tissue; that yet, at least, his clothes might not hinder his access to her presence for the free opening of his griefs. It is but a slight sorrow that abides to take in outward comforts; Mordecai refuses that kind offer, and would have Esther see that his affliction was such as that he might well resolve to put off his sackcloth and his skin at once; that he must mourn to death, rather than see her face to live.—*Bishop Hall*.

Ignorant as yet of the evil that was purposed against her nation, and supposing that it was some private sorrow that pressed upon the spirit of her friend, Esther sent a change of raiment to him, thus expressing her desire that, whatever the cause of his trouble was, she was anxious that he should be comforted. This was one of the ways in which, in those times and countries, sympathy and affliction were manifested. And so we learn that when the prodigal returned, the father said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." And it is in allusion to the same custom that the Saviour says, "The Lord hath sent me to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." It is a very pleasing trait in the character of Esther, that her advancement, and the grandeur and luxury of the palace,

had not made her forget the friend of her childhood. His grief touched her heart, and she would have him know this. But his sorrow was too deeply-seated to be assuaged even by her kindness. Mordecai refused the raiment which she sent, and persisted in wearing his sackcloth. The rejection of such a present would have been accounted highly offensive in ordinary circumstances, but it only made Esther apprehend that Mordecai's trouble must be of no usual kind.—*Davidson*.

Esther, in her elevation, and in separation from her friends, was far from forgetting them. She was deeply afflicted when she heard of the mourning habit and sore affliction of Mordecai. She was vexed that he should appear at the king's gate in a dress in which he could not enter it, and therefore sent to him a change of raiment. But she knew not the sources of his distress. Grief so firmly rooted and so well founded could not be removed without a removal of its cause. To send him change of raiment was like singing songs to a heavy heart. Mordecai was doubtless pleased with her kind attention; but she must do something of a very different nature to banish his sorrows.—*Larson*.

The character of Esther is greatly enhanced in our view from this little incidental circumstance. It shows that her feelings had not been blunted by her exaltation and the influences of the court life of Shushan; that she was not self-contained, but had an admirable tenderness and consideration for others, and that she was willing to relieve their burdens by becoming herself a sharer in and a mutual bearer of them. Never does woman appear more noble, and we might almost say resplendent in moral beauty, than when becoming a true "Sister of Mercy" to our fallen humanity. The New Testament Scriptures sparkle and glitter with such characters as this. Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with pure spikenard of

great price, and wiping them with the hairs of her head, as if she could not find a token sufficiently tender of her respect and love. Martha actively engaged in benefitting a beloved brother, and unweariedly serving in every-day life the Saviour whom she adored. Dorcas "full of good works and alms-deeds," seeking to help the poor and comfort the widows at Joppa, and leaving behind a blank when she died, the greatness of which was evinced by the tears of a bereaved multitude. Phoebe, the deaconess of Cenehrea, a "succourer of many." Priscilla, the true helpmate of her devoted husband in the work of the Lord. Lydia, and Joanna, and Susanna, and Syntyche, and Salome, and Tryphena, and Tryphosa, and many others, whose names are in the book of life. The ministry of woman may be silent and noiseless as the light which shines into the chamber in the morning without breaking the repose of the sleeper; but as the light, too, it is mighty in diffusing around cheerfulness and blessing. And never does she appear more laudably than in the homes of the suffering, like the angel who strengthened our Lord in his agony. So do we honour Esther the more because of this sidelight thrown on her character. Though it was only a sorrowful kinsman wailing at the gate, yet was there on this account one queenly heart in the palace which was "exceedingly grieved."—*McEwan*.

So Esther's maids came and told it her.—She herself (say interpreters) was kept in a closer place than they, not having the liberty of going abroad, as others had, because the Persians that were of highest quality used so to keep in their wives; and if they went forth at any time, they were carried in a close chariot, so as that none could see them.

Then was the queen exceedingly grieved.—*Dolens exhorruit.* So Tremellius. The Hebrew is, she grieved herself, *scil.*, for Mordecai's heaviness; as our Saviour, when he heard of the death of his friend Lazarus, groaned in spirit and troubled himself. And here we see that of Plautus disproved—No woman can grieve heartily for anything.

Holy Esther is here sick at heart of grief, as the word importeth; and yet (as one saith of the Lady Jane Grey) she made grief itself amiable—her night-clothes becoming her as well as her day-dressings, by reason of her gracious deportment.

And she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai.—That he might be fit to come unto her, and make known the cause of his grief, for she yet knew nothing of the public calamity. And although she was so highly advanced above Mordecai, yet she condoleth with him, and honoureth him as much as ever. This was true friendship. *Ego aliter amare non didici*, said Basil to one that disliked him for stooping so low to an old friend.

But he received it not.—Such was the greatness of his grief which he could not dissemble, such was his care of the community, that he could not mind his own private concerns while it went ill with the public. Such also was his patient continuance in well-doing, that he would not give over asking of God till he had received, seeking till he had found, knocking till the gate of grace was open. His clothes were good enough, unless his condition were more comfortable.—*Trapp*.

Temporal fortunes and successes are never so great as not to be subject to sorrow, terror, and fear. God permits his Church to be plunged into sorrow at times; he leads her even into hell; but he also takes her out again. Though the Lord elevate us to high honours, we should never be ashamed of our poor relatives, but rather relieve their needs. We should never reject proper and suitable means to escape a danger, but promptly use them.—*Starke*.

At first the lazy (*i. e.* Jews) do not snore. For the Holy Spirit exhorts us in all adversities to confide in the Lord; he does not exhort us to be indolent, indifferent, and sleepy. For our confidence in the Lord is a powerful and efficacious means of stimulating in his service all strength and limbs. Further, the Jews, though in the greatest peril, do not utter violent words against the king, nor do they fly to arms. Mordecai and the other Jews rend their garments, put on sackcloth, strew ashes

upon their heads, wail, weep, and fast. These manifestations signify not that the Jews in Persia were turbulent, but that they take refuge in God; since help could not be discovered upon earth, they seek it from heaven. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." By this example we too are taught, that when afflictions are sent upon us we should reflect that God sets before us the fat oxen and calves which we may offer to him. In this may we offer to God in our prayers the afflictions which we sustain, and call upon the name of the Lord that he may help us. Behold, however, the reverse of this order of things. The palaces of princes are Divinely instituted to be the places of refuge for the miserable. On the contrary, in the palaces of Persia nothing is regarded as more odious and abominable than men with the signs of affliction. Heaven is ever open to the cries of mourners, and God is never unapproachable to those calling on his name by faith.—*Brenz.*

Vers. 1, 6. 1. Mordecai rends his clothing, and puts on sackcloth and ashes. He enters the city thus, and raises a great and bitter lamentation. So also the Church of God, in its development as regards the history of humanity, should again and ever anew put on the habiliments of mourning. "The world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful." The then existing nation of Jews could not manifest its loyalty to law without coming into conflict with heathendom. Nor can the Church bring to development its inherent spiritual powers without challenging all the Hamans and their opposition in the world. Even this present period is an instance in proof. Following upon the great progress of the things of the kingdom of God since the time of wars for freedom, we must naturally expect reactions, such as have been manifest in the sphere of science and other relations. Indeed, we must constantly look for increasing opposition on the part of the world. But when the Church shall have fully developed the gifts of grace granted to it, then conflict and sorrow

will have reached its highest point at the end of the days. The real cause of sorrow on the part of the true members of God's Church will not be, as was the case with Mordecai, their own distress, but that of the world. It will consist in the fact that the world is still devoid of the blessed society of the true God; that the kingdom of God is still rejected and even persecuted. What joy it would give if, instead of enmity, recognition and submission, and, instead of disdain, a participation in the gifts and grace of our Lord, were to become the universal experience.

2. The more difficult the position of the Church as in contrast with the world, the more favourable is her position for bringing to view her glory. Her glory is that of her Head. If in the Old Testament times, and in the "dispersion" itself, there existed a Mordecai, who for love of his people manifested his firmness and strength in the hour of tribulation; and if there was found an Esther, who, when called upon, willingly came forward to bring about the salvation of her countrymen; how much more in New Testament times and in the modern Church will there arise individuals who, in following the Lord, especially in evil days, will manifest a watchful care for others and a self-sacrificing spirit for them; who will show forth patience and meekness as well as energy, fidelity, and tenacity, a spirit of giving and an ability to make sacrifices; and withal will carry in their hearts joy and peace as the seal of their kinship with God. All these graces may be so many illuminating rays of the glorious life of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who more and more attains in them a full stature. May all seize the special opportunity, recognize the particular duty, and know when to perform it, which the times of distress of the Church place in the hand, of showing forth the power that dwells in them by their life and work!

3. Mordecai took an especially great part in the universal grief that overcame the Jews when the edict of their annihilation was issued and promulgated. It was not his personal danger that alarmed

him, but, as may be expected of such a faithful follower of Judaism, it was the calamity threatening the whole Jewish people. While, however, thought and feeling were centred upon the event, he was free from despair. With him it was a settled conviction that the people of God, as a whole, could not be destroyed, and that deliverance must come from some source. Instead of giving way to despondency, he turned his distress into a power that urged him to still greater endeavours. There was no more a fear of appearing as a Jew, nor did he hesitate because his loud lamentations would attract general attention, and thereby expose him to the derision and disdain of many. However reluctant he might have been to expose his beloved Esther, whose welfare had ever been a matter of great concern to him, to extreme danger, still he persisted with the greatest determination that she should run the whole risk, and only rested when she gave her assent. It is barely possible that he attributed some blame to himself because of his firmness against Haman, or thought that on that account he more than any other was under obligation to remove the threatened danger. The sole moving impulse was doubtless his love for his people. But this should not be less in any member of the Church. It should rather, in proportion as there are more members in the body of Christ, be stronger than it was in him. Would that no one among us were behind him as regards energy, self-denial, and a willingness to make sacrifice! There are doubtless many who are able to endure all this in their own person. But—if no lighter consideration—the thought that their relatives, yea, even wife and children, may suffer on account of their confession bows them down. Would,

if necessary, that we too may stand equal to Mordecai in willingness to surrender our dearest kin!

4. Mordecai manifests a remarkable tenacity as opposed to Esther. He keeps his position at the gate of the king until she sends him not only her maids with garments, but also Hatach to transmit his message. He departs not thence until she has resolved to stand before Ahasuerus as a Jew pleading for the Jews. Under other circumstances he might have been thought to be tiresome by his persistency and demands; but his relation to her now justified it. When he had been accustomed to inquire concerning her health and well-being, to give her counsel, to care for her, he had shown no less persistency; and his demand that now she should reveal her Jewish descent, and as such should venture all, was equally in keeping with his character. So long as no danger threatened he counselled her to keep silence respecting her Jewish parentage; but now he had himself taken the lead in an open confession of the fact. Although it had before been difficult for him to approach Esther as the queen, or request any favour at her hand now he hesitated no longer to implore her help, not so much for himself, as for the whole people. There was no motive for him to be selfish, or to conduct himself in a heartless or severe manner towards her. Hence there was no question but that his undertaking would succeed, that Esther would be willing to comply with his request. It is eminently desirable that those who, like him, must move and induce others to make sacrifices of self and possessions in the service of the kingdom of God, should stand on a level with him in this respect.—*Lange*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 5, 6.

A MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT.

“Hatach, one of the eunuchs in the court of Ahasuerus, in immediate attendance on Esther.” This is the short and simple biography of Hatach given in the secular chronicles, and the account given in the sacred chronicle is not much longer. However, the best men have not the longest biographies. Indeed, it may be safely

asserted that some of earth's noblest sons have not had their virtues either recorded by the historian or celebrated by the poet. Modest goodness blooms in the shade, and passes away without a grand funeral oration. Not the merely useful, but the brilliant life is that which commands attention and receives applause. Hatach's life does not seem to have been of the brilliant character. His position precluded the possibility of startling adventure. He moved along in a quiet sphere; but he is commended now as being a pleasing contrast to the character given of other eunuchs. Fryer and Chardin describe the eunuchs as being the base and ready tools of licentiousness, as tyrannical in humour, and pertinacious in the authority which they exercise; as eluded and ridiculed by those whom it is their office to guard. Hatach evidently did not take a mean advantage arising from his position. Instead of being tyrannical in humour, and pertinacious in authority, he appears to have been amenable to the authority of Esther, and to have done her bidding most readily. It may be that Hatach felt the salutary influence of Esther's loveliness and Esther's virtuous nature. As she exercised a wise influence over her maids, so she may have exercised a similar influence over Hatach. A good life is not without its influential power. A good woman's influence is especially radiating and subduing and elevating. This eunuch must have received moral as well as material advantages from this ministerial appointment. In serving Ahasuerus he served one of the mightiest of earthly kings at that period; but in serving Esther he was waiting upon one who was the servant of the King of all worlds. God can so order it that the servants of kings shall be the servants of his chosen; so that earthly kings become indirectly, and sometimes directly, the servants of heaven's royal children. Earthly ambition is to minister to the royalties of earth; but the noblest ambition is to minister to the royalties of heaven. This ministry is satisfactory, and is sure to meet with its appropriate reward. And if Hatach served with a view to this higher ministry, he may claim a distant kinship with that other eunuch, who served Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and who said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Why may not Esther have her converted eunuch as well as Philip? Heaven is larger than we think. Time is peopling eternity. Heaven's children may come from heathen palaces as well as from Christian homes. But we may safely leave Hatach and his kind to the mercy of that God who is larger than the dogmatists.

I. A ministerial appointment suggested by self-love. Hatach was appointed by King Ahasuerus to attend upon Esther. And it must be plain that Ahasuerus made this appointment not to subserve the interests of his subjects, not to consolidate his kingdom, not to make his people virtuous and happy, but to minister either to his own vanity or to his love of pleasure. Such an appointment finds its counterpart in other times and in far different states of society. How many appointments all through life are made in consequence of the working of self-love! We have often heard the phrase court favourites. The minions of the court are found not only in the palace, but in the house of legislature, on the seat of justice, and at the head of the army. The ablest men are not always selected, but the men who can bring the most influence to bear. The men who can successfully appeal to the selfishness of the ruling powers will rise above the heads of those superior men who either cannot or will not use such base means for elevation. It is a happy thing in our times that commoners—men not noble by birth, but noble by sterling worth and by brilliant characters—are taking their place in the front ranks. But still the men who can fawn and cringe and not be true to principle are in high places. In the ecclesiastical kingdom too ministerial appointments are made through the working of this low principle of self-love. Sometimes unconscious, it may be, but nevertheless operative. There is nepotism in the Church. The son or the nephew gets the good living, while the superior man remains a curate still. The man, in other Churches, of showy qualities secures the votes of the congregation, while the man of more solid but less brilliant character is left in obscurity. It is what we

may call a happy chance when the working of self-love brings the best man to the front. We have no reason to suppose that the appointment of Hatach was not a good one.

II. A ministerial appointment suggested by unselfish love. Ahasuerus made a ministerial appointment, and Esther also made a ministerial appointment. Ahasuerus appointed Hatach to attend upon Esther, and Esther gave Hatach a commandment to Mordecai. The latter appointment arose out of the working of unselfish love. Esther's affection for her foster father would not let her rest, and she sent the chamberlain to minister to Mordecai in his distress. The best appointments are those which are made through the working of unselfish love. Selfishness blinds the mind and dwarfs the judgment. Benevolence is a truer guide in affairs than great intellect if perverted by the working of selfishness. The king who through true love to his subjects seeks their highest welfare will make the best appointments in his kingdom. The Church that has a true love for humanity, that is most desirous of blessing the race, of instructing the ignorant, of raising the fallen, and of giving the oil of joy to the mourners, will secure the services of the truest servants in her courts. Shall we not here think of the highest ministerial appointment made at the suggestion of infinite love? "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

III. A ministerial appointment to the young and the joyful. We can well imagine that there was great gladness to Hatach when he "received a call" to serve in the palace of Ahasuerus, and had to "attend upon" the young, the beautiful, and the joyful Esther. In one sense it would be a pleasant life, and comparatively free from irksome duties. To wait upon other court beauties might be painful, for the mere beauty is often exacting and difficult to please. The more her demands are met, and the more numerous do they become. The very monotony of her life may render it difficult to soothe her ill humours, and to find the means of relieving the dulness of her existence. But this difficulty would not obtain in the case of Esther, for she had beauty of mind as well as beauty of person. She would be able to fall back upon herself. As the good man is satisfied from himself, so Esther the good woman would be satisfied from herself. It is well said that she required nothing. The smallness of her requirements rendered it an easy task for Hatach to perform the duties of his post. How delightful to wait upon this young and joyful maiden! Instead of Hatach being required to charm away her griefs, we may easily and reasonably suppose that she would be a wise charmer to Hatach. His sorrows would be forgotten in her presence, and his joys would be increased by the influence of her joyful nature. Happy the man who has to wait upon the young and the joyful! As we think of the condition, we shrink from acknowledging the truth of the wise man's statement. Sorrow is better than laughter. Men long for appointments where life is rendered pleasant. To serve in the palace is more an object of ambition than to serve in the abodes of misery. The house of feasting is desired rather than the house of mourning. To preach in the well-arranged and tastefully-built and decorated place of worship to a crowded and fashionable audience is the fond desire of the large majority.

IV. A ministerial appointment to the old and the mournful. Hatach, we find, was willing to go to Mordecai, the poor Jew, clothed in his hairy garment and having ashes on his head. He passes from Esther to Mordecai with no signs of unwillingness. He would willingly find out the means of lessening the anxiety of Esther, while at the same time he seeks to lessen the grief of Mordecai. This is the true ministry, to seek to comfort the aged, and to console the mourners. The highest Minister set himself to this glorious work. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of

sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." How slow most men are to follow this sublime example! This world is full of mourners; but the cries of the mourners would be hushed in greater measure if there were men with sympathetic and benevolent natures going forth with words of gospel sweetness in their hearts, and the oil of gospel consolations in their hands.

V. An undesigned connection arising from this ministerial appointment.

Here there is a wonderful chain of unexpected links. Ahasuerus, the mighty monarch, ruling over the largest empire of the world, at one end of the chain; and Mordecai, the despised and captive Jew, at the other end of the chain—the joining links being Esther the queen and Hatach the king's chamberlain. From a human point of view, how mysterious are the ways by which men are linked together. The monarch is bound to the captive by an invisible bond, and is nearer than he thinks. We are indeed members one of another. There is a communistic principle working in societies. But let there not be communistic violence. Let not Ahasuerus forget the just claims of Mordecai. Let the monarch remember that manhood has its rights. And let not the Mordecais seek their rights by violence, but betake themselves to fasting and prayer, as did this Mordecai, and deliverance must come sooner or later. But these undesigned connections of earth are the designed connections of heaven. It was evidently so in this case, and it is so in a greater number of cases than we suppose. A greater number of cases! If we believe in a great supreme Power ruling over all, must we not behold his guiding and selecting power and wisdom in all cases, or at least making use of earth's selections for the advancement of his beneficent and all-wise purposes? And God's direct ministerial appointments do establish an extended connection. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation!" The angels form a blessed connection between the poor souls, enslaved by sin, but enfranchised by Divine grace, and the eternal God. Wonderful the connection between Mordecai and Ahasuerus, but surely more wonderful still the connection between the sinful but redeemed creature and the glorious Creator. The gospel ministry speaks to us in visible fashion of this connection. Redeemed men speak to men still in their sins. Christ's true ambassadors stand between and join together the Saviour and the believing sinner. The undesigned coincidences and connections of life are coincidences and connections because God is working. The undesigned may be the product of Divine purpose. The human has its undesigned movements, the Divine has no purposeless motions. All is harmonious. The very discords of earth shall work to the production of final and eternal concords. Chaos itself will give birth to Divine order. Confusion is working to the evolution of method. There are links of connection binding all things together, both in the material and in the moral world.

VI. The unintentional benefit conferred by this ministerial appointment.

Ahasuerus had not the slightest idea of helping those Jews against whom he had issued the murderous edict at the instigation of Haman. But here he is. Strange to himself would his conduct have appeared if he had known all. At one time he is working for the destruction of the Jews, and at another working for their deliverance. Working for their deliverance not only in his selection of Esther to be queen, but in the appointment of Hatach to be her minister. Esther herself could not hold conference with Mordecai, and so Hatach the king's chamberlain becomes the medium of communication. The very vices of kings have tended to the welfare of their subjects; but no excuse this for the vices. The blunders of sovereigns have worked out to the vindication of the truth; but this does not condone the blunders. Kings by their weakness, by their love of display, by their fondness for pleasure have unintentionally conferred benefits upon their people. They have sometimes made wise appointments, and the nation has rejoiced because the righteous are in authority. By way of pleasant contrast, notice that the benefits conferred by heaven's ministerial appointments are intentional. God's material ministers move

and work for the bestowal of benefits in answer to his merciful intention. God's intellectual and moral ministers think, and speak, and write, and act for the bestowal of benefits, for they have been raised up for this very purpose by his benevolence. God's benevolence is not the working of a kind feeling only, but is the expression of his infinite mind designing the welfare of his creatures. Whatever benefits we receive from the ministry of others, while we practically show our appreciation of such a beneficial ministry, let us above all manifest our sense of indebtedness to God, from whom and by whom all true ministerial appointments proceed and are made.

Notice that—(a) *A true ministry is two-sided.* It is quite true that a ministry of any importance must be many-sided. In these modern times the ministry as that word has come to be used in an ecclesiastical sense, has upon it many claims. The modern minister, if he is to meet the demands of the time, if he is to reach, half way even, the standard set up by lecturers on preaching and preachers, must be more than human; he should indeed have eyes behind and before. But the ministry of which we now speak is one not treated of in books on homiletics. Hatach is not considered in the "*letters ad clerum*." There is a ministry where no eloquence of tongue is required. The eloquence of the life is that which is required in every ministry. Thus the true ministry is two-sided. It looks to heaven and it looks to earth. It waits upon the joyful and goes with messages of comfort to the mourners. Hatach waited in the palace and then went to the palace gates. Let us use the case as a figurative teaching. Wait in the palace of heaven, by prayer and meditation, that we may minister to those standing without. (b) *The highest ministry is impelled by unselfish love.* We are not in a position to declare the motives which operated in the mind of Hatach; but this we know, that the pure womanly love of Esther impelled Hatach to go and speak to the mourning Mordecai. Hatach may after all have been a mere servile menial in the hands of Esther; still his ministry was the result of love in Esther, and was therefore of the highest order. A base minister may perform the useful and beneficial acts of the ministry of love. But where love operates in the mind, love from without and from above co-operating with love from within, and moving to noblest action, there must be the highest ministry. (c) *The noblest ministry is that which seeks lowly spheres.* "Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate." Hatach may not have relished the errand on which he was sent, but still he went. Esther commanded, and Hatach obeyed. Lowly spheres may not always be desired; but if the command is given, the command ought to be obeyed. The streets of modern cities are in a neglected condition. The mourners tread the pavements with heavy hearts, and no Hatach asks what is the cause of the sorrow, no Hatach comes from royal abodes to inquire if nothing can be done to remove the burden of grief. Divine love gives a commandment for the poor outcasts—"Go into the highways and hedges," but few are found ready to obey. Those who do go are not always judicious. They have not heart sympathy with the distressed. They raise dismal noises, and become a nuisance; instead of quietly and lovingly asking "what it was, and why it was," as did Hatach. (d) *The tests for all ministries.* Is it uniting earth and heaven? Is it bringing together all classes? Every life ought to be a ministry, and every life should be tested by these questions. Is it conferring both material and moral benefits? There should be no unproductive classes. Every life should be a ministry of good. Is it a ministry for the instruction of the ignorant, for the restoration of the fallen, and for the consolation of the mourners? Happy the nation where the inmates of the palace consider and seek to promote the welfare and happiness of those in the streets of the cities and outside the palace gates. There are still Hamans about our palaces. There will be Mordecais with bleeding hearts. And the Esthers and the Hatachs have still plenty of room to work.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5, 6.

If we weep in sincerity with those who weep, it will be our desire, if possible, to remove their sorrows. But to this end it is necessary to know their cause. Physicians cannot administer proper medicines to their patients unless they know the cause of their diseases. They may palliate the symptoms, but the root of the distemper remains if the cause is not removed. So we may soothe the minds of persons labouring under grief; but if they are rooted in the mind, they will soon recover their force, and hold the soul in misery, unless the causes are removed; and these cannot be removed but by a change in those outward circumstances which occasioned them, or by a change in the state of the mind, when it is convinced that the supposed causes do not exist, or that they are not sufficient grounds for the sorrows they occasioned, or that relief or consolation may be found of virtue sufficient to counteract their force. Esther could not now visit Mordecai, or call him to her palace, and therefore, conversing with him by means of a third person, inquires into the causes of his distress, with a sincere intention to do everything in her power to set his heart at ease.—*Laurson*.

The good queen is astonished with this constant humiliation of so dear a friend, and now sends Hatach, a trusty though a pagan attendant, to inquire into the occasion of this so irremediable heaviness. It should seem Esther inquired not greatly into matters of state; that which perplexed all Shushan was not yet known to her; her followers, not knowing her to be a Jewess, conceived not how the news might concern her, and therefore had forborne the relation. Mordecai first informs her, by her messenger, of the decree that was gone out against all her nation, of the day wherein they must all prepare to bleed, of the sum which Haman had proffered for their heads, and delivers the copy of that bloody edict, charging her now, if ever, to bestir herself, and to improve all her love, all her power, with King

Ahasuerus, in a speedy and humble supplication for the saving of the life not of himself so much as of her people.—*Bishop Hall*.

The lesson which I would give you is founded on Mordecai's grief and Esther's sympathy. Gladly would she have removed the sorrow of her friend, and willingly would she have mingled her tears with his, had it been permitted. Her sympathy he could not doubt; but there are griefs deeper than human sympathy can reach, and Mordecai's were beyond Esther's power to assuage. She could only be helpful by speaking to the king. It was the king alone that could change the sorrow into joy. The mourners in Zion have the sympathy of their brethren, and that sympathy is sweet. But still it cannot heal the wounds of a spirit that is troubled by the sense of sin, nor of a heart that is sore pierced by God's afflictive dispensation. But the King of Zion can heal these wounds; and he is touched with the feeling of his people's infirmities—he breaketh not the bruised reed; he will heal them. Cast yourselves upon Jesus, ye mourners, with simple-hearted faith, and ask of him the comfort which ye need, and you will receive the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.—*Davidson*.

So strictly did the laws of Persia confine wives, especially the king's wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther about this important affair; but divers messages are here carried between them by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and it seems he was one she could confide in. She sent to Mordecai to know more particularly and fully what the trouble was which he was now lamenting, and why it was that he would not put off his sackcloth. To inquire thus after news, that we may know the better how to direct our griefs and joys, our prayers and praises, well becomes all those that love Zion. If we must weep with those that weep, we must know why they weep.—*Matthew Henry*.

Then called Esther for Hatach.—She snuffeth not at Mordecai's refusal of her courtesy. She saith not, Let him choose; the next offer shall be worse. Solomon reckoneth among those four things that the earth cannot bear, a handmaid advanced to the place and state of a mistress. But Esther was none such. In her you might have seen singular humility in height of honours. She calleth there for Hatach, a faithful servant, and perhaps a Jew, a Jew inwardly. Honesty flows from piety.

Whom he had appointed to attend upon her.—Heb., whom he had set before her, to be at her beck and obedience. Probably he was happy in such a service, for goodness is communicative, and of a spreading nature. Plutarch saith of the neighbour villages of Rome in Numa's time, that, sucking in the air of that city, they breathed righteousness and devotion. So it might very well be here. It was so with Abraham's servants, and Solomon's, and Cornelius's. Nero complained (and no wonder) that he could never find a faithful servant. What could they learn from him but villany and cruelty?

And gave him a commandment to Mordecai, i.e. she commanded him to deliver her mind to Mordecai. A servant is not to be inquisitive (John xv. 15—he knoweth not what his lord doeth), but executive, ready to do what is required of him. He is the master's instrument, and wholly his, *ὡς ἐκείνου*, saith Aristotle. The hands must take counsel of the head, and bestir them.

To know what it was, and why it was.—Some great matter she well knew it must needs be that put him to these loud laments. Wise men cry not till they are sorely hurt. Job's stroke was heavier than his groaning. He was not of those that are ever whining; like some men's flesh, if their skin be but razed with a pin, it presently rankleth and festereth; or, like rotten boughs, if a light weight be but hung on them, they presently creak and break. Mordecai she knew was none such. She therefore sendeth to see what was the matter, that she might help him, if possible. The tears and means of men

in misery are not to be slighted, as if they were nothing to us. Who is afflicted, and I burn not? saith Paul. Weep with those that weep, else you add to their misery, as the priest and Levite did by passing by the wounded man. Is it nothing to you, O ye that pass by the way? Are ye not also in the body, that is, in the body of flesh and frailty, subject to like afflictions? And may not your sins procure their sufferings, as a vein is opened in the arm to ease the pain of the head.—*Trapp.*

A Christian is no libertine, no man of freedom. He is a servant. Indeed, we have changed our master. We are set at liberty from the slavery of sin and Satan; but it is not that we should do nothing, to be Belials without yoke; but it is to serve God. We are taken from the service of Satan to be the Lord's freemen; and indeed it is to that end. We are delivered that we might serve God. Therefore all the actions of our life should be a "service" to God. The beasts and other creatures and we have common actions, such as we do in common, as to eat, and to drink, and to move. The beast doth this, and man doth it. When a man doth them they are reasonable actions, because they are guided by reason, and moderated by reason; but when the beast doth them they are the actions of a beast, because he hath no better faculty to guide him. So common actions, they are not a service of God as they come from common men, that have not grace and the Spirit of God in their hearts; they are mere buying and selling, and going about the actions of their callings, as the actions of a beast are the actions of a beast. But let a Christian come to do them, he hath a higher life and a higher spirit that makes them spiritual actions that are common in themselves. He raiseth them to a higher order and rank. Therefore a Christian "serveth" God. In all that he doth he hath an eye to God; that which another man doth with no eye to God, but merely in civil respects. The knowledge of a commonwealth, it is a building knowledge, a commanding knowledge; for though a statesman doth not build, he doth not buy and sell and

commerce, but he useth all other trades for the good of the state. It is a knowledge commanding all other inferior arts and trades in a commonwealth to the last end. They should all be serviceable to the commonwealth; and if they be not, away with them. So religion, and the knowledge of Divine things, it is a commanding knowledge; it commands all other services in our callings, &c. It doth not teach a man what he shall do in particular in his calling; but it teacheth him how to direct that calling to serve God, to be advantageous and helpful to his general calling; to further him to heaven, to make everything reductive to his last end, which he sets before him; that is, to honour and serve God in all things, to whom he desires to approve himself in life and death. He hath a principle, the Holy Ghost in him, and he labours to reduce everything to the main end. Oh that we were in this temper!

God will have his children serve out their generation, to try the truth of our graces before we come to heaven. And he will have us perfect before we come to so holy a place. He will have us "grow in grace," as Ahasuerus his wives were to be perfumed and prepared before they came to him. It is a holy place that we hope for, a holy condition; therefore he will have us by little and little be fitted by the Spirit of God.

The Scripture values men by that that God values them, and not as men do, by their life, and reign, and flourishing in the world, and their esteem with men, but as his carriage hath been to God. David "served the will of God" in his generation.

Concerning the relation of *servants*, in a word, some are so by office, as magistrates and ministers, but all are servants as Christians. It was the best flower in David's garland to be a servant to the Lord; and it is so for every one, be they never so great in dignity, to serve God; for to serve him is to run into the most noble service of all, for all God's servants shall be kings, nay, they are kings. And then it is a rich and most beneficial service; for we serve a Lord that will reward to a cup of cold water. It is not

such a service as Pharaoh's was, to gather stubble ourselves; but he will enable us to do, and where we fail he will pardon, and when we do anything he will reward, and when our enemies oppress us he will take our parts.

A child of God is the greatest free-man, and the best servant, even as Christ was the best servant, yet none so free; and the greater portion any man hath of his Spirit, the freer disposition he hath to serve every one in love. Even the basest works are a service of God when they are done in obedience to God. The poor servant "serves the Lord Christ." When a poor servant is at his work, employed in the business of man, poor, common things, yet he serves the Lord all the while. He serves those that are his governors, with an eye to the great Governor and Master that is above all, that will reward them for their poor service, however their master reward them.—*Sibbes*.

Every man may be considered under a double capacity or relation. As he is a part or member of the body politic, and so is not his own, but stands included in and possessed by the community. In which capacity he is obliged to contribute his proportion of help to the public, as sharing from thence with others the benefits of society, and so being accountable to make it some retribution in his particular station and condition. A man may be considered as he is a member and subject of a spiritual and higher kingdom. And in this capacity he is to pursue the personal yet great interest of his own salvation. He is sent into this world to make sure of a better; to glorify his Maker by studying to save himself; and, in a word, to aim at enjoyments Divine and supernatural, and higher than this animal life can aspire unto. Every man then sustains a double capacity, according to which he has a double work or calling. A temporal one, by which he is to fill up some place in the commonwealth by the exercise of some useful profession, whether as a divine, lawyer, or physician; a merchant, soldier, mariner, or any inferior handicraft; by all which, as by so many greater and less wheels, the

business of the vast body of the public is carried on, its necessities served, and its state upheld. And God, who has ordained both society and order, accounts himself so much served by each man's diligent pursuit, though of the meanest trade, that his stepping out of the bounds of it to some other work (as he presumes) more excellent is but a bold and thankless presumption, by which the man puts himself out of the common way and guard of Providence. For God requires no man to be praying or reading when the exigence of his profession calls him to his hammer or his needle; nor commands any one from his shop to go hear sermon in the church, much less to preach one in the pulpit. God, as the Lord and great Master of the family of the universe, is still calling upon all his servants to work and labour. A thing so much disdained by the gallant and the epicure is yet that general standing price that God and nature has set upon every

enjoyment this side heaven; and he that invades the possession of anything, but upon this claim, is an intruder and a usurper. I have given order, says the Apostle, "that if any refuse to labour, neither should he eat." It is the active arm and the busy hand that must both purvey for the mouth and, withal, give it a right to every morsel that is put into it. Correspondent to a Christian's other, that is, his spiritual capacity, he has also a spiritual calling or profession; and the work that this engages him to is that grand one of working out his salvation; a work that a life is too little for, had a man anything more than a life to bestow upon it; a work that runs out into eternity, and upon which depends the woe or welfare of an immortal soul. Now this work is threefold—to make our peace with God; to get our sins mortified; to get our hearts purified with the contrary graces.—*South.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 6—9.

A STRANGE MEETING.

The onlookers might very reasonably ask, Who are those two men standing together, in close conference, in the street of the city before the king's gate, and what is the meaning of their confidential interview? For it must have been an unusual thing for the king's chamberlain to be seen talking to a despised Jew. The wicked, those who took part with revengeful Haman, might well consider the meeting with alarm. The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but here is a man pursuing—a man armed with Divine powers, as is evident from his history—a man of strong purpose, of upright intentions, and of sagacious spirit—and the wicked had every reason for alarm had they only known the situation. But those who were not condemned in their own consciences might calmly pass these two men by, and pursue without fear their appointed way. It is well so to conduct our lives that we need not be suspicious of evil when we see others holding private interviews. Whispers can only disturb guilty consciences. Some might fancy that these two men thus strangely meeting together were plotting mischief against the monarch. For men are ever too prone to think evil. But we know better. Let us consider the nature of this strange meeting.

I. An important interview. The importance of a conference is not always to be measured by the number of persons gathered together. The meeting of two people may be fraught with more important results than the meeting of two thousand. Indeed, as too many cooks spoil the broth, so it often is that too many people at a conference bring about confusion, and no practical results are produced. And, after all, at large conferences the manipulation of measures is in the hands of a few, either of the wisest or of the most pushing. The meeting of Hatach and of Mordecai was one of the most important at that period in the dominion of Ahasuerus. The importance of a conference is not to be measured by the magnificence of the place

of meeting. In the present day if any great philanthropic, political, or religious measure is to be discussed, a large gathering must be summoned in the splendid hall, in the gilded saloon, or in the stately ecclesiastical edifice. There was once a small gathering in an insignificant upper room which was productive of greater results than any assembly since that time. Hatach and Mordecai met in the street, but they did more important work than the grandees meeting in Shushan the palace. The importance of a conference is not always to be measured by the worldly position—by the names of the men who meet together as renowned for rank, for prowess in arms, for skill in strategy, for genius in oratory, or for excellence in debate—of those who are assembled. Though this is the modern fashion, a fashion which has been repeating itself through all time. The *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily News* would have given as many lines to record the insignificant fact that Ahasuerus had taken a walk, as they would to record the important interview between Hatach and Mordecai in the streets of the city. But mighty issues were depending upon this interview. That which is little noticed is often of most importance. That which the superficial do not observe may be transcendently significant. The meeting of two poor men may either destroy or save the city, but it is unnoticed in earthly chronicles; while the meetings of the rich and of the great are described in glowing phrases, though their meetings may be of no consequence to the world at large, beneficially considered. Notice the wisdom of the sacred chronicles. They describe the meetings, whether of rich or of poor, whether of kings or of subjects, whether of noble or of ignoble, that have far-reaching results. These chronicles take no superficial views. They record for all time. The meeting of Saul the persecutor and Christ the Saviour was not recorded by the scribes, but it was the most important meeting of all time.

II. A full disclosure. “And Mordecai told him of all that had happened.” A sorrowful tale was that which Mordecai had to tell, and no doubt very painful to him would be the relation. But he did not shrink from the painful task, for patriotism laid upon him a stern necessity. Sometimes it is a mitigation of our sorrows to unburden our minds fully, and to tell all the tale of the causes of our grief to a friend; at others, silence, or comparative reserve, is our safety. We may well suppose, that here, in one aspect, Mordecai would not wish to tell all to this eunuch. Still it must be told, and sternly he opens up his sores to one of a foreign nation. Sometimes sin presses heavily upon the mind of the convinced sinner. But he shrinks from a candid inspection of his sinfulness, and from full confession even to that God who knows all. The sensitive mind naturally recoils from full confession of sinfulness to a fellow-creature; and yet, why should we shrink from full confession to God? The truest wisdom is to make a full disclosure. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Mordecai made a full disclosure of the intensity of Haman’s purpose. Money power was evidently as omnipotent in Persia as it is in England. Haman was so intent upon the accomplishment of his purpose that he promised to pay a large sum of money into the king’s treasuries. This is still a good test by which to get to know whether or not a man is intense in his purpose. When a man expresses an earnest desire to have some scheme carried out, just ask him how much he is willing to give for its accomplishment? Money may be given with the sincere desire of doing good. This is the noblest method of disposing of wealth. In fact, the only true method. In this way there is that scattereth earthly treasure and yet increaseth; sometimes earthly treasure, but at all times heavenly treasure. We must see to it that our motive is pure in giving. Money may be given for the purpose of making a name. Too many give at the dictate of an ostentatious spirit. The printing of subscription-lists is a device of the wisdom of this world. Divine wisdom says, Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. Money may be promised and given in order to promote an evil purpose. It was so in the case of Haman. He knew it would help on his evil design. He probably knew that

he would gain by the transaction if it were successful. Too many give even to a good cause with the hope of getting their money back with a large percentage for the loan. For it is little more than a loan. It is a kind of speculative transaction. Mordecai made a full *disclosure of the malignity of Haman's purpose*. Haman's dark design was to destroy all the Jews. It is highly probable that Haman had hatred for all the Jews, and that the offence of Mordecai was but the means of calling out that hatred into active play. Haman might blame Mordecai, but he had much more reason to blame his own ill-regulated nature. How often we blame others, when we ought to blame ourselves! The fancied, or even real, wrong-doings of others can be no justification for wrong on our part. Even if Mordecai were wrong in refusing to bow, Haman was not right in seeking revenge. Let us seek the subjugation of inward evil, and then outward evil will not act upon us injuriously, for it will find no kindred element on which to work. Mordecai would not make a full *disclosure unless he spoke of his own concern for the safety and welfare of his people*. He told of all that happened to him, and what happened to the Jews was a sorrow to the patriotic Mordecai. He would not in unseemly boastfulness extol his patriotism. Yet he must show that he was most deeply interested in the fate of his countrymen. For himself, he was ready to die if his death would secure the deliverance of his people. But his heart was bleeding at the thought that all his people were exposed to death. We want this spirit, to lose our own personal sorrows in the sorrows of our people.

III. Witnessing credentials. The tale which Hatach had to tell to Esther was one of a most marvellous character. It is an illustration of the statement that fact is stranger than fiction. Esther might very well doubt the truth of this dark design. But there could be no escape from the fact when Hatach placed in her hands the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan. This writing might be given to Esther not only to witness to the truth of Hatach's narration, but that she might more fully understand all the bearings of the case. When we have a tale to tell detrimental to the character of another let us be sure that we are correct. Let us look out for the copy of the writing of the decree. Some people in telling an evil tale about another think it is quite sufficient to say he has a bad character. Haman was a bad character. Esther must have read his nature. But Mordecai does not say Haman's character is enough to make Esther believe the story, but he sends along with the story a copy of the writing of the decree. We must not condemn a man on mere *hearsay*. And again, some people in telling an evil tale profess to be indignant if they are not at once believed. Mordecai did not say, If Esther does not believe my story the matter must drop; I shall say no more; she has no right to suppose that I should fabricate an evil story. But, like a wise man, he backs up the story with a copy of the writing of the decree. It might be a more unjust thing for me to believe a man capable of some great crime than for me to doubt the man who speaks of such capability. There should be credentials to every tale. If every evil accusation were to be believed and acted upon, our prisons would have to be very considerably enlarged.

IV. A solemn charge. Esther was charged by Mordecai to go in unto the king. The Persian queen was not as the English queen. The former was subject. She had not the rights of an ordinary English wife. She could not go in and out as she pleased. It was therefore a solemn charge which Mordecai now gave to Esther. He knew the gravity of the work, and already his faith had fixed upon Esther as God's chosen instrument. Esther was now charged to go on a perilous errand. She was to go alone. It is easier to go with the multitude to face danger than to go alone. Many a man who would be bold in the company of a multitude, would be a coward when standing alone. From time to time we receive solemn charges to go alone, or to stand alone. Let us be faithful to the call and the post of duty. This is our great encouragement; there is never any danger in going alone, in a right spirit, unto the King Eternal. The danger is in not going alone

sufficiently often. How often conscience charges us to go in unto the King, and how often we disobey! The neglect of private prayer is ruinous to the soul.

V. An honourable office. The office to which Esther was now appointed was that of intercessor. How noble and glorious the work to intercede on behalf of the people! How noble the conduct of Bunyan's wife pleading with the judge for her husband's liberty! How noble the conduct of Queen Philippa pleading with Edward for the pardon of the six burgesses of Calais! But nobler still was that office to which Esther was appointed to plead with the king for the salvation of her people. There was neither selfishness prompting to, nor applause to be secured, by Esther's course of conduct, so far as she then knew. The work of an intercessor is ever glorious. What glory attaches to him who is the great High Priest of the Christian religion! That he might be a successful pleader he not merely exposed himself to danger, but passed through suffering. Esther might be a successful pleader without herself suffering. We know that she was. The very success of her intercessions contributed to her greatness and her glory. But Jesus could only be a successful intercessor as he endured suffering. He was made perfect through suffering, that he might be a faithful High Priest. Let us confess our indebtedness to this glorious Intercessor. Let us not stint our meed of praise. Let us consecrate ourselves to his holy and ennobling service.

VI. A faithful messenger. It very often depends upon the nature of the message as to whether or not we like faithfulness in the messenger. However, the rule should be not what is liked, but what is right to be done. It was right for Hatach to tell a true tale to Esther, though it might sorely grieve her heart. Some messengers would have told Esther only half a tale, and have made Mordecai's story amount to nothing. Some doctors never give a true statement of the case to their patients, and thus sometimes do great harm. It perhaps would not be wise always to tell all the truth. But it is never wise to tell an untruth, or to bring a false report. "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters." Let us be faithful messengers. Speak the truth in love. Be refreshing powers in this land of drought.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 6—9.

And Mordecai told him all that had happened unto him.—Not by fate or blind fortune, but by the providence of God, which hath a hand in ordering the most casual and fortuitous events, to the execution of his righteous counsels; neither is there a Providence but we shall once see a wonder or a mercy wrapt up in it.

And of the sum of money.—Money is the monarch of this present world. Money is to many dearer than their heart's blood, yet, to gratify their lusts, they lavish silver out of the bag, and care not to purchase revenge or sensual delights with misery, beggary, discredit, damnation.

Also he gave him the copy of the writing.—That she might see it, and rest assured that it was even so, and no otherwise; and that therefore now or never

she must bestir herself for the labouring Church.

That was given at Shushan.—Which if ever it were full of judgment, and white as a lily (according to the name), is now stained with blood of innocents; if ever righteousness did lodge in it, yet now murderers.

To show it unto Esther.—That her eye might affect her heart, and her heart set all awork for her people; that is, herself, according to that, "Physician, heal thyself;" that is, thine own countrymen.

And to declare it unto her.—In the cause, viz. his refusing to bow to Haman against his conscience (whereof it no whit repented him); and in the several circumstances, laid forth in the liveliest colours, for her thorough information.

And to charge her that she should go in unto the king.—This Mordecai knew would hardly be done; he, therefore, makes use of his ancient authority, and sets it on with greatest earnestness. So St. Paul, “I charge you by the Lord;” and again, “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a weakness to be hot in a cold matter, but it is wickedness to be cold in a hot matter. He that is earnest in good, though he may carry some things indiscreetly, yet is he far better than a time-server and a cold friend to the truth; like as in falling forward is nothing so much danger as in falling backward. Eli was to blame with his, Do no more so, my sons. And so was Jehoshaphat with his, Let not the king say so. And the people in Ahab’s time, who, when they were pressed to express whom they were for, God or Baal, they answered not a word. And yet how many such cold friends hath the truth now-a-days!—lukewarm Laodiceans; neuter, passive Christians, &c. When Callidus once declared against Gallus with a faint and languishing voice, Oh, saith Tully, *In nisi figneris, sic ageres?* Wouldest thou plead in that manner if thou wert in good earnest? Men’s faint appearing for God’s cause shows they do but feign; their coldness probably concludeth they do but counterfeit. Mordecai plays the man, and chargeth Esther to improve her interest in the king, her husband, for the Church’s deliverance. See here how he turneth every stone, tradeth every talent, leaveth no means unused, no course unattempted, for the saints’ safety. And this the Spirit of God hath purposely recorded, that all may learn to lay out themselves to the utmost for the public; to be most zealous for the conservation and defence of the Church, when it is afflicted and opposed by persecutors; seeing they cannot be saved unless she is in safety, neither can they have God for their Father unless they love and observe this their dear mother. Oh that these things were duly considered by all sorts now-a-days!

And Hathach came and told Esther.—He acted the part of a faithful messenger: so must ministers, those servants

of the Churches, declare unto the people all the mind of God, and not steal God’s word every one from his neighbour; not deal deceitfully with it; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, let them speak in Christ; and let them speak out not fearing any colours. He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully, saith God. Aaron’s bells were all of gold; the trumpets of the sanctuary were of pure silver; they did not sound a retreat when they should have sounded an alarm; no more must God’s messengers. Whatsoever the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak, saith Micaiah. Paul, as he received what he delivered, so he delivered whatsoever he received. Moses was faithful in all God’s house.—*Trapp.*

It is unpleasant to be the messenger of bad tidings. It is, however, often useful. If a physician saw you labouring under a mortal distemper, and insensible to your danger, he is the preserver of your life, when, by warning you of the peril of your condition, he rouses your diligence to apply the proper remedy. Esther must have been shocked beyond measure at hearing of a sentence of death pronounced against her dearest friends, against her whole people, against herself, by the man who had raised her to a share in his bed, and in his throne, without a crime proved against any one of them. But it was better to hear of it at present, than ten or eleven months afterwards, when it would be too late to provide a remedy.

There are some who cannot bear to hear of any bad tidings, however true, and think those men their enemies who tell them the truth. They consider those friends or preachers as their enemies who speak to them of their sins, and of the judgments of God denounced against them. But was not Esther under deep obligations to Mordecai for informing her of the danger of her people, and urging her to exert her influence for preserving them? Whether was Ahab most indebted to those prophets who told him that the Lord was with him, and would give him victory at Ramoth-Gilead, or to him who told him that he would fall in the battle? By following

the counsel of the former, he lost his life. He might have preserved it, if he had believed the latter.

It is indeed cruel to distress men by false or doubtful intelligence of calamities that have not happened, or, if they have happened, cannot be remedied. Mordecai was far from wishing to disquiet the mind of his royal friend by uncertain rumours. But he had too good intelligence to be mistaken, and puts into her hands decisive proofs of the danger of her people, and of Haman's activity in procuring their ruin. Nor did he give her this intelligence to torment her before the time. If nothing could have been done to avert the danger, he might have permitted her to enjoy tranquillity till it could be concealed no longer. But who could tell what might be the result of supplication to the king, especially from a queen who was understood to be the object of his warmest love! He therefore desires, or rather requires, her to go in and make intercession to the king for the people, and for her own life.

Mordecai uses authority in his language to the queen, and does her great honour by using such language. He durst not have charged her to do her duty, if he had not known her humbleness of mind in her greatness. She was as much disposed as in her youngest days to give

him the authority of a father; and this he knew so well that he uses it without scruple or apology. Happy are the men on whom prosperity makes no change but for the better!

He charges her to make intercession to the king. The knowledge of that dreadful situation in which the Jews were placed, was to be improved by all the Jews as a call to fasting and intercession with the God of heaven, on whom their hope was to rest. But it was to be improved by the queen in particular, as a motive to the exertion of all her influence with the king. All, according to their places and stations, are bound to do what they can to avert threatened miseries from their nation. But some are bound to do much more than others, because they have peculiar opportunities, which, if they are not improved, must render them in some degree accountable for the mischiefs consequent on their neglect. Those who can do nothing by their own power, may do much by their influence with others. In the reign of the bloody Jehoiakim, the princes of Judah saved Jeremiah from his hands. If these princes had not used their influence for this purpose, they must have shared in the guilt of his blood.—*Lawson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 10—12.

PRUDENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Objections may be raised against any enterprise simply by way of shielding the unwillingness of the objectors. They object merely for the sake of objecting. They are unwilling to come out boldly and say that they do not intend to take any part in the scheme. They hide themselves behind the false plea of the difficulties in the way of bringing the scheme to a successful issue. They may see both the necessity and the propriety of the work being done, and are too cowardly to profess themselves unwilling to do their duty. They would show themselves as willing to do the work, and yet keep affirming that the work cannot be done. Now the after conduct of Esther cannot justify us in supposing that she raised objections on this principle. She is not here to be hastily condemned. Again, some raise objections through the working of a prudential spirit. They earnestly desire to further the enterprise, but are appalled by the presence of real difficulties. Such deserve our sympathy. Surely Esther in this trying period of her history will command our sympathy. The objections she here raises are of no fictitious character. They were real. They were well known to Mordecai, and to all those acquainted with the customs of a Persian court. Poor Esther!—how well thou dost

deserve our sympathy ! A beautiful queen loved by all, and till very lately adored by the monarch, thou dost now stand alone and apparently forsaken of all. Yet not alone, for thy God is with thee, and will appear to thy glory. Even when we seem to be most forsaken, then it may be that the good Lord is most near. His help is sure to be near when most we need his helping hand.

The first objection raised by Esther referred to a state arrangement of the Persian court. None could unbidden approach the monarch unless by incurring the penalty of death. Even the loved wife was not excluded from this barbarous arrangement. What, then, was Esther to do under the circumstances? How was it likely that she could become a successful pleader ! Here there was the prospect of death. Who likes to rush on death, especially when life is opening out new attractions ! Esther was not now a disappointed jade ; her heart was not yet broken. The little neglect she now experienced would soon pass away. It could not have been an unknown event in such a state of things as prevailed in a Persian court. She had then still bright prospects, and was she by mere rashness to imperil her position, and to imperil that position for no good purpose ? Death can only be welcomed by those whose life is but a living death. To most death is feared. To the young and the beautiful death is a fearsome enemy. Well may Esther be appalled by the difficulty of that enterprise to which Mordecai would summon her in the intense ardour of his patriotism.

The second objection raised by Esther referred to a fact of a domestic character. She had not been called to go in unto the king for thirty days. Here is a strange anomaly—strange if received in the light of Christian teaching and the customs of modern life. But not very peculiar if viewed in connection with the customs of those barbaric days. The ardour of this fickle monarch had for the time cooled. The beauty of the toy pleased him for a while, and now he flung it from him, and suffered it to lie neglected. A poor soul was Alasuerus to prefer the company of the wicked Haman before the company of the beautiful and virtuous Esther. However, this fact made a greater difficulty in the way of Esther's success. It presented the prospect not only of death but of failure. If she had lost her influence with the monarch for herself, how could she hope to influence him for the salvation of a despised race ? We cannot wonder that Esther shrank from obeying the summons of Mordecai. Our wonder is that she was ever able to nerve herself up to go in unto the king. The greatness of her heroism comes out in this fact, that she fully saw all the difficulty of her position, all the hazard of the enterprise, and yet she ventured. She calmly estimated the danger, and bravely made the venture.

Here learn (1) That it is well to *look before we leap*. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it ? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand ? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace." 2. *That he who looks well may be expected to leap well*. To look well is not to look so as to render the nature powerless by reason of the hazard. To look well is to estimate the difficulties at their true measure, and to understand the nature of the leap which is required, and to gather up all strength—strength from every quarter—strength from earth and strength from heaven—in order to make a successful leap. Esther looked well and then leaped well. The world's heroes have been men of true vision. They have seen all. They have looked at all sides. They have considered the *for* and the *against*. 3. *That the difficult leap may be the Divine pathway*. Human pathways are not as the Divine. God's pathways are not all well paved—smooth and level. We can only travel along

them by leaps; yea, the very leap itself is the Divine way. Rough was Esther's path just now, but it was her Divinely-appointed way. 4. *That those who take the difficult leap at the call of duty may expect Divine support.* This is what Mordecai implies in his reply to Esther's objections, and this is what we shall find that she afterwards experienced. Divine support is given to every faithful worker. Divine support is the guarantee of ultimate success. In our goings we may get battered and bruised; but a Divine hand can heal the bruises, and restore the battered part to soundness. Our very bruises may be our salvation, and contribute to the success of our cause. The cause may rise by and upon the fall of its supporters. It is not every worker who has the good fortune of Esther. She contributed both to the success of her cause, and worked out greater glory for herself. However, that servant is glorious who triumphs in his fall if it secures the success of his cause. Jesus died, that by his death men might have life. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 10—12.

There are two kinds of courage—the mere *animal* courage, which results from well-strung nerves, and is exerted by impulse rather than by reflection; and the *moral* courage, which, on a calm calculation of difficulties, and of the path of duty, will face the difficulties and prosecute the path of duty at any hazard, even at the risk of life itself. It will often be found that men are deficient in the latter of these qualities, while they are remarkable for the former. It will be found, for example, that soldiers who will rush fearlessly upon an enemy, braving death without one symptom of alarm, are incapable of submitting to the calm endurance of trouble, and are like others alarmed when they have to meet death quietly after lingering illness. It is courage of the highest and noblest order, then, we say, which braves danger and death upon cool reflection. Such was the courage of the martyrs, and such was the courage of Esther. As a timid female, she drew back at first from the hazardous enterprise to which Mordecai called her; but when she had fully weighed the matter, and perceived the real path of duty, although the danger was not in the least degree diminished, she resolved, in the strength of God, to encounter it.—*Davidson*.

But why was Esther so afraid of her life if she should make intercession to the king for the life of her people? Was it so criminal in the court of Persia to present a supplication to the king?

Or, if it was a crime in others, was it a crime even in the queen? Yes; it was universally known, says Esther, and Mordecai could not well be ignorant of it, that if any person should venture, uncalled, to approach the king in the inner court of his palace, he must be put to death, unless the king was pleased graciously to pardon him; nor was the queen herself excepted from the penalties of this law. The laws of the Persians were strange indeed! No man was allowed in a mourning-habit to enter into the king's gate; and no man in any apparel was allowed to come near the king in the inner court. Did these kings ever consider for what end they were elevated above their fellow-men? Was it not to defend the poor and the afflicted, and to do judgment and justice to all their people? How could they do the duties of princes, if they were inaccessible to their people? But if it was a crime to intrude into the private apartments of the palace, and to disturb the privacy of the prince, was it one of those atrocious crimes that can be justly punished with death? Could no easier punishment assuage the wrath of a proud mortal, who wished to make himself invisible like his Maker? Surely it may be said of a law that punished an offence like this with death, that it was written in blood; and of a government which would establish such laws, that Daniel had too good reason to represent it by the emblem of a bear.*

* Dan. vii. 5.

Blessed be God, the laws of heaven are not like those of the Persians! Our King who dwells on high is at all times accessible to the afflicted mourner. The poor and the afflicted had ready access to Jesus while he was upon the earth; nor is he less accessible in his state of glory. At all times we may come near to God, even to his throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Esther was believed by Mordecai to be a great favourite with the king; and doubtless there was a time when she was very dear to him. But Esther was afraid that this time was past, and questioned whether Mordecai would insist upon the charge he had given her, when he was informed, that for thirty days past she had not been called to go in unto the king. This she considered as a sign that his affection was alienated, and that it was questionable whether the golden sceptre would be held out to her, if she should presume to enter the king's apartment. What reason the king had for this coldness to his virtuous

queen, we know not. This is plain, that it was a providential trial appointed for Esther, by which it would be known whether she had the courage to serve her people and her God at the risk of her life. It was a severe trial of her faith and charity. She felt the force of the discouragement, and expressed her sense of it to Mordecai, that she might receive further directions from him.

To whatever difficult duty we are called, we may lay our account with trials. If thou desirest to serve the Lord, look for temptation. But remember, that "the man is blessed who endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive of the Lord the crown of life which he hath promised to them that love him." Those who have held on in the path of duty, under sore temptation, shall at last "stand before the throne of God with white robes, and palms in their hands." "But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their portion in the lake of fire burning with brimstone, which is the second death." — *Lawson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 13, 14.

A HUMAN VOICE SPEAKS DIVINE LESSONS FOR HUMAN LIVES.

God has not left himself without witness in the material creation. Through all time he has been, and is still, speaking to the children of men by the visible things of the lower world, which he hath made. On all hands we may find testimonies to his power, his wisdom, and even in some measure to his goodness. A clearer witness he gives of himself in revelation. By its aid we learn to read aright the lessons of nature. By its teachings we are taught truths nature could not teach. There the voices of patriarch, of prophet, of apostle, and of the Great Teacher, speak to us Divine lessons. But there we find other voices speaking in an undertone, but none the less inculcating Divine lessons, and laying down the true rules for noble living. Mordecai is not to be numbered amongst either the patriarchs, the prophets, or the apostles, still his voice is morally significant. Esther, on the first hearing of Mordecai's answer, might only hear the voice of a man; but afterwards she evidently heard in that voice a Divine tone. Whatever she did or did not discern in the voice of Mordecai it is for us to hear it speaking to us Divine lessons. If we rightly judge that Mordecai was a Divine agent, then we shall rightly conclude that an important utterance like the one contained in this solemn declaration is not to be allowed to fall to the ground as meaningless. And perhaps it may be well to observe, that if we were in a proper frame of mind, if we were more receptive of Divine impressions, many voices that are now allowed to pass away as unimportant would become to us as true Divine utterances. What are the Divine lessons which this human voice speaks, not only to Esther but to every true soul?

I. That great advantages are conferred for a Divine purpose. By far too

large a majority of men and of women receive the advantages of talents, of position, of influence, and of wealth, with unreflecting minds as well as unthankful hearts. Like the lower animals, they receive blessings without thinking that they ought to be turned to good account. They forget that privilege implies responsibility; that talents are given that they may be put to Divine uses. That receiving is in order to giving. This is the law of nature. This is the law of morals. This is the law for individuals, for communities, for nations, and for Churches. Esther had conferred upon her the great worldly advantage of being made queen in the mightiest empire of the then known world; and Mordecai would show her that such an advantage was not without its Divine purpose. She had come to the kingdom for such a time as that—a time of trouble and perplexity to her people, a time when she might use the advantages of her position for the people's deliverance. And have we not all conferred upon us great advantages? Some are blessed with advantages of an earthly nature. Most are blessed with the advantage of hearing the sweet sound of the gospel. Many are blessed with the advantage of being members of the Church which is the bride of Heaven's Eternal King. Here is an advantage, if we could only rightly see it, before which the advantage of Esther in being made the queen of Ahasuerus pales its splendours. If Mordecai could see that Esther's advantages were conferred for a Divine purpose, what would he say, what shall we conclude, with reference to our advantages? Now these advantages are only rightly considered as they are viewed in the light of Divine purposes. What shall I say of my money? Is it given merely for the purpose of self-aggrandisement? Shall I not use it as the wise steward, feeling that it is the Lord's property? What shall I say of my talents? Are they given merely that I may become famous amongst men? Shall I not feel that they are to be employed for the good of men and for the glory of God? What shall I say of the gospel by which I am saved? Am I merely to try and keep it to myself? Am I not saved myself that I may help to save others? Thus to look at all our blessings in the light of a Divine benevolent purpose, is the way to bring about a more intense appreciation of those blessings, as well as to ennoble and glorify our lives. This is the true light which can enlighten the murky days of our earthly existence. The most brilliant—most brilliant from an earthly point of view—of earthly lives can be made more brilliant by causing them consciously and intentionally to subserve and to promote Divine purposes. And the poorest of earthly lives may be lifted out of the darkness of their poverty by being consecrated to the great end of glorifying God our Maker. This is the light which cheered the patriarchs in their long pilgrimages, which sustained the prophets in their trying careers, which supported the apostles in their self-denying labours, and which made radiant the dark pathway of the martyrs. And this is a light which, by Divine grace, can turn for every man the gloom of earth into the glad lightness of heaven.

II. That God requires that such advantages should be faithfully used for the promotion of his purposes. Mordecai's voice to Esther was a Divine summons. It was God's call, telling her to make use of the advantages of her position for the deliverance of the oppressed. It seemed to say, Thou hast been raised to a high position for the good of others. This is a great crisis in the history of providential movements, and thou hast come to the kingdom by Divine appointment. And here learn one of the lessons of God's providential dealings for the support of our faith—that in times of great trial God has his delivering agents in prepared readiness. Esther was ready when Haman's plot was culminating. David was ready when Goliath threatened the armies of Israel. Elijah was ready when the prophets of Baal were triumphing. The true prophets were ready when the need was great. Jesus was ready when the fulness of the time was come. Stephen was ready when a martyr was required, and Saul was to be converted. Peter was ready when the gospel was to be given to the Gentiles. Paul was ready when argumentative skill was demanded. Luther was ready when Romanism was rife

with darkest heresy. The 2000 confes-sors were ready when a protesting testimony was to be delivered. Whitefield and Wesley were ready when religion in this land was declining. And we may still believe that God has his agents ready. This is our consolation, and this is also to stimulate to greater energy. Advantages are to be faithfully used for the promotion of Divine purposes. Is it objected that we do not know what are the purposes of God? It may be replied that we shall not fail in serving Divine purposes if we sincerely seek to promote his glory. Our efforts may be blundering and imperfect, yet if sincere our imperfect doings will be wrought into, and made to form an important part of, the great Divine plan. Upward, then, O Church of the living God, to a faithful discharge of thy duties! Let all talents, all advantages, all opportunities, and all seasonable occasions be quickly seized and ardently employed in the noblest cause. Let the Mordecais at the gates and the Esthers in the palaces co-operate, for a great crisis has been reached. And who knows but that a great crisis has been reached in our own country's history? Are we ready? Whether that be so or not, in this world of sin there is always much work to do. It may be again objected that we have no great advantages,—no speciality either of talents or of position. Mordecai had no position, but he was a most important instrument in Divine providence, because he was faithful. Esther at first seemed to plead that she could do nothing. It may be, that, like Esther, we can do a great deal more than we at first imagine. Yea, like Esther, we may be able to do that very thing which God requires to be done. And this should be our great encouragement to still more faithful and ardent endeavour—that God does not demand from any that which they are not able to give. God condemns, not because there is only one talent—for that might be to condemn his own appointment—but because the one talent has not produced any interest. He does not require the impossible. A Samson's strength is not expected from an infant's weakness. The hesitating Isaac asks, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" The child's question was natural and innocent. It required Abraham's faith to say: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for the burnt-offering." God deals with the child Isaac according to one method, and with the patriarch Abraham according to another. Divine methods are methods of justice guided by wisdom, and tempered by mercy. There is one power of the sun, and another very feeble of the glow-worm. There is the majesty of the cedar-trees, and the weakness of the grass-blade. One star differeth from another star in glory. And one man differeth from another in talents, in organization, in wealth, in favourable circumstances and surroundings. There are differences of administration; but the same spirit worketh all and in all. The Infinite Ruler only requires that we reach out and up to the measure of our ability. To Hatach is one service appointed; to Mordecai another; and to Esther another. The voice of exhortation is: Art thou but a bruised reed?—put on thy strength. Art thou but as a smoking taper?—shine as brightly as thou canst, and the little spark will grow into a goodly flame, and send out its light far and wide. Hast thou but one talent?—put it out to usury, and at the Lord's coming he shall receive his own with interest. Hast thou but two mites?—cast them both into the treasury of the Lord, and thou shalt enrich the ages.

III. That such Divine purposes cannot be frustrated. Human purposes can be thwarted, as we know very well. Man cannot foresee all the contingent circumstances which may form a barrier through which his purposes cannot pass, or which they cannot overleap, and move onward to accomplishment. Man cannot always watch over his purposes from their inception to a triumphant conclusion. Man is not only short-sighted but short-lived. This is one sign of man's greatness and man's littleness—that he can project purposes that may flourish over his tomb. With God, however, purpose and fulfilment are closely connected. The latter is bound up in the former. Our finite minds cannot understand what is meant by the purpose of God. There is a future to man, but what future can there be to

the Omnipresent? Man looks forward to an object to be accomplished, but does the Infinite One look either before or after? Certainly not, in one sense. This, however, we may most surely learn—that there is not purpose with God in a merely human sense; there can be to him no contingent future; the march of human events must be harmonious with Divine movements, whatever they may be. If then one agent, through that wonderful gift of moral power, refuses to be God's instrument, he can purpose another. If Esther determines to hold her peace, then shall there deliverance arise from another place—by another agent. Notice the wonderful manner of Divine operations. If the agent is at first unwilling, then God comes forth and makes such agent willing for the day of his Divine power. Esther at first unwilling, through the natural timidity of her sex, through the sense of her incompetency to do any good, becomes in God's hand sweetly moulded and fitted for the task, so that she becomes heroic in her complete self-abandonment to the promotion of the Divine design. Moses at first says: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" But Moses afterwards appears a God to Pharaoh; and Aaron his prophet. If we be the Lord's chosen he will prepare us to do his work. And yet further—and sadly to be considered if not instructively—if we remain obdurate, if we do not try to read aright Divine purposes, and the meaning of our present position, God can use us against our will. He can force us to take part in the promotion of the benevolent scheme. He could make an unwilling Esther bring enlargement and deliverance to the Jews. How humiliating! To be the bond-slave of Divine purposes. To be like a galley-slave compelled to work the oars of the vessel that is to enrich the one we oppose. How glorious, on the other hand, to be a willing servant—a slave, yet free, because the slave of love. Esther's praises are now sung not because she was the queen of Ahasuerus, but because she was the delivering queen of her people, the royal agent to bring about Divine purposes. God's purposes then must be accomplished, either by us, or by some others; either by us willingly, or by us unwillingly; and we have in some measure this awful power of choice. Which way do we decide? Let the response be, "Here am I, O Lord, but a broken vessel; yet mend and prepare, so that I may be a chosen vessel to bear abroad the sweet fragrance of the Saviour's name."

IV. Those who seek to frustrate Divine purposes shall be injured. Mordecai by the greatness of his faith becomes at once both heroic and prophetic. He is a teaching prophet. He expounds the general principles of Divine operations. His faith is both a production and a producer. It is the product of far-reaching views of the purposes of God. And it begets in his soul still more extended views. It lifts him to the heights of inspiration. He speaks like one inspired. He speaks as one moved by the Holy Ghost. Strong faith is an inspiration. It enables a man to do great things, and to speak noble truths. How strangely marvellous and profound the utterance; "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. If thou altogether holdest thy peace . . . thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." Think not that thou canst fight against the purposes of God and remain uninjured. The king's palace cannot protect those who wage war with the King of heaven. These may seem hard things to utter. Mordecai may be pronounced an unfeeling man. The doctor is not necessarily an unfeeling man when he probes the wound in order to promote health. The speaker is not necessarily an unfeeling man when he utters hard things in order to prevent injury, and to rouse to healthy action. Mordecai is not unfeeling, for there was a needs be that the whole truth should be spoken. And these things are largely and broadly true. The purposes of God are as the thick bosses of his bucklers, and those who rush against those thick bosses will do so to their own damage. Those who go contrary to the unwritten purposes of God in nature will do so to their own injury. The laws of nature are the expressions of Divine purposes. These laws must be obeyed. All men who are reasonable acknowledge this. They seek to find out these laws, and work in harmony with nature's teachings. Break the natural

law, and it will be avenged. Frustrate the purpose of the Creator, and damage and suffering must ensue sooner or later. There is a purpose in providential movements. We may not always be able to see clearly that purpose, but if we desire to be faithful God will reveal so much of that purpose as is needful for our guidance. Woe be to the man who opposes the purposes of God in providence. There is a gracious purpose in the gospel. Resist that purpose, and destruction follows. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Finally, **Learn that a faithful discharge of duty must bring rich results.** It was so in Esther's case, as we shall more fully see hereafter. She followed Mordecai's leading, and was both blessed and the instrument of blessing. It will be so more or less in all cases. The results of a faithful discharge of duty are far-reaching. They stretch themselves through all time. They are fraught with eternal issues. They act and react. Mercy blesses him that gives and him that takes. And so a faithful discharge of duty blesses giver and receiver alike. Beware of the folly of waiting for rare opportunities, for glorious openings, for great crises in human history. Do not wait till a nation is threatened with destruction, and thou art raised to some high position which will enable thee to deliver on a grand scale, and reap a harvest of applause. All cannot be queens in the palace of Ahasuerus. Some must be as Mordecai at the gate. The man who waits in idleness for some great work to do will not be ready when the opportunity is presented, will most likely live a barren life, and will leave behind no fragrant memories. There are rich rewards to faithful workers. Rich rewards on earth and rich rewards in heaven. Crowns of glory that fade not away. Our small doings will be wonderfully enlarged and glorified by Divine grace. He that soweth to the glory of God on this earth shall reap a golden harvest of Divine benedictions on the plains of the upper paradise.

GOD'S PURPOSE AND MAN'S OPPORTUNITY. VERSE 14.

Great honours if suddenly achieved are often connected with great perils; and our text has reference to a peril of no common magnitude. The fate of a whole people was, through the success of a wicked plot, trembling in the balance. Humanly speaking, that fate would be settled this way or that according to the impression which Mordecai might make upon Esther's mind. We know that the right impression *was* made, and that the right end *was* attained—the preservation of the Jews, and the destruction of the remorseless man who had plotted theirs.

Now, without putting any pressure on this passage, it is thought that we may find certain principles of Divine administration which are capable of easy and profitable application to our present circumstances. I draw from the text the following general truths:—

That running through the providence of this world, there is a gracious Divine purpose for its ultimate salvation.

That rich and rare opportunities occur in the progress of things, by which believing men are allowed to come effectually "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

That the neglect of such providential calls has a tendency to bring destruction.

That obedience will bring elevation and blessing.

I. Divine purpose. It is very clear that Mordecai rested his faith on some fundamental and changeless purpose of God, in reference to the Jewish people. In fact, he believed in the indestructibility of the Jews; and this with him was evidently a *religious* faith. He believed this, because he believed in God and in his revealed will. There was no natural ground for supposing that they would *not* perish, according to the terms of the bloody edict which had gone forth. They were a captive, a scattered, a feeble people, without mutual concert, without leaders, without power of resistance. The fatal counsel had taken effect on the royal mind.

The ring had passed from the king's hand; the death-letters had been written; the royal seal impressed on each; the posts hastened out of the city away to the different provinces, and the whole land was struck with fear and perplexity by the suddenness and terrific character of the decree. Yet here is a man of the doomed race whose faith lifts him above his fear!—a man who, by simply grasping one great truth, can smile serenely at the portents and terrors of the time. “My people cannot perish!” That is his unwavering faith. Now, that faith must have been founded on one or more of the express promises of God. Thus the purpose of the preservation of the Jews is but a branch and a sign of another and a grander purpose—a purpose to gather and to save the whole world. Always to our severer thought, and in our more perfect frames, this *end* has arisen to our view, like the shining summits of inaccessible mountains which the traveller can never reach, but by which he guides his way; and we have seen and felt that it is wisest, holiest, best, that neither man nor universe can ever come into the place of God; that neither human happiness, nor the universal harmony of things, can ever reach so high, or shine so bright, as the glory of the all-perfect One. In the contemplation of this end, our thought returns unto its rest in the stillness of truth; our affections are imbued most deeply with the harmonies of the everlasting love, and the forces of our life spring up with most gigantic energy. Then we live indeed, for God liveth in us that we may will and do of his good pleasure. The light of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ. And this is the “glory of the Lord, which shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” The purpose of God to achieve this grand result is clearly recorded in many parts of his revealed will. Expressed or implied, we find it in every book: it types itself in the kingly history; it gleams in the prophet's vision; it breathes in the holy psalm; speaks out in the *Acts* of the Apostles; runs through all the Epistles, and sighs up to heaven in that last apocalyptic cry, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

II. Human opportunity. We pass now from Divine purpose to human opportunity. There is no need to expound the general doctrine of opportunity. “Our time is always ready.” “We are workers together with God.” We must spend the gospel, or lose it. But while, in a general sense, there is always opportunity to every one, God's providence is so cast that now and again opportunities of a richer and rarer kind occur. We have a striking instance of this in the text. No queen in the world but Esther had any chance of doing what Mordecai asks at her hand; only once in *her* life was such a grand possibility and such a dread alternative placed before her. A few moments, probably, settled all. In her quick and grand resolve she made herself a queen indeed! the heroine of a wondrous story! a fountain of salvation to a whole people! mistress and monarch, for the time, of all the earth! And such, often-times, in character and quickness, is *our* opportunity too. Our moral opportunities, our seasonable times for action and usefulness, are very precious, are very brief, and when they are gone they cannot be renewed. God's great purpose will travel on, but our co-operation there is impossible for ever. So, too, it is at times with Churches, with societies, and with nations. A Church grows and prospers for a while, and then comes to a point of spiritual potentiality where her state is tested and her history determined. She *must* at that point either become the city on the hill, or sink back into the shades of obscurity. A nation suffers, and struggles, and grows, and then comes a time—it may be a time of war, or a time of peace, but it is a crucial time to her—and in a few years, perhaps, the scale of the great balance in which she is being held and weighed, *rises*, and she is too light to be further used for God's purposes; or *falls*, and she is settled in her place as one of his great kingdoms on the earth.

III. The law of destruction. “Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and

thy father's house shall be destroyed." "The Jews"—God's people—are *not* dependent, as they seem to be, for their preservation, upon you; there are "other places" from which the deliverance so much needed will *immediately* spring if you are unfaithful, or unequal in any way to the great occasion. But you are dependent for *your* preservation on your loyalty and fealty to them. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed." We are not sure whether Mordecai himself knew in what manner his prediction would be accomplished. It is probable that it stood out in his view, and in the view of Esther, not so much in the light of a personal and particular penalty which would overtake her and her father's house by what we call a special providence, as in the light of a general principle of retribution, acting at *all* times, but *sure* to act swiftly and terribly in a case like this. That this principle of retribution is still in force cannot for a moment be doubted. It has all the force and fixedness of law. It has its fullest application to the ungodly. The way, the hope, the expectation, the works, the memory, and, saddest of all, the soul of the wicked, shall all perish. But God is no respecter of persons, and neither are his laws. Let a Christian man neglect opportunities, and hold truth in unrighteousness, and bind down his soul to commonness, and what will happen to him? *Can* that man be going on to joyous harvest-time as a Christian should! It is impossible. In fact, he is *perishing* as to the real power of his life. In the main he is living so that this great law of destruction is fastening upon his whole exterior life. More completely still does the principle apply to churches, and societies, and nations. All associations of men, civil and sacred, Church and State alike, are judged by the king *now*. No Church, society, or nation *can* live, except as they continue to be in harmony with the purpose and the providence of God. *The one* Church cannot perish; the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, but they *do* prevail against every particular Church that is unfaithful. Where are the seven Churches in Asia? All darkened and dead. The "lamps" have long since gone out, and can never be relumed. It would be a waste of time to remind you at length how this principle of judgment and destruction has been applied to *nations*. The whole history of this world, rightly read, is but a commentary and a confirmation of the doctrine of destruction which the text contains. No doubt this principle is applied in this our native land. If we are "righteous" we shall be exalted; if we are sinful we shall be disgraced. If we serve God in the line of his purpose for the world's salvation, we shall flourish; if we do not, we and our father's house shall be destroyed.

IV. The law of life. There is a law of *life* in God's gracious providence as well as a law of destruction, and following the beautiful turn given to the sentiment of the text, we say now, "Who knoweth whether we are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" It is possible, even very probable. God does not play capriciously with signs and scenes of Providence. As Englishmen, we have come to a kingdom such as never before was seen among men. The very thought of it is almost overwhelming. To circumscribe the bounds of our empire we must traverse every continent, and sail over every sea. The great Roman empire in its palmiest days was nothing like it. The whole world waits for us—watches what we do, listens to what we say. What a gigantic kingdom! "Who knoweth whether we are come to it for such a time as this?" But as Christians we have come to a greater kingdom still, ruled by the "King of kings." Although not *of* this world, this Kingdom is intensely and unconquerably *in* it. Its principles are rooted beneath the uttermost foundations of society. Opportunity is so quick, possibilities are so great, forces are so strong, and the prospects of the opening future are so enrapturing, but *yet* so dependent on faithfulness in the present hour, that we must be "*ready* for every good work," or lose our function and our peculiar place in the great time on which we have fallen. It *is* a great, a glorious time—"such a time as this!" The gates are lifting up their heads. The everlasting doors are opening. The King himself *is* coming soon. He gives us new commission to herald his

advent, and prepare his way in every land. And looking up to his eternal purpose of love and mercy, observing these rich and high opportunities, fearing the sweep of that law of destruction which carries the wicked and the slothful away; but strong, through grace in the law of life, we venture now to say, not "who knoweth?" but, Lord, *Thou* knowest,—Thou who knowest all things; and we, by the humble yet resolute purpose, which we renew before thy face, and in thy strength to-day. Thou knowest, and we know, that we are "come to the kingdom for such a time as this!" *Amen.* — *Dr. Raleigh's Sermon for the London Missionary Society. Abridged.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 13, 14.

Receiving is in order to giving. This is the law of nature. The clouds receive from the sea, and give back fertilizing showers to the earth. The soil receives from the clouds, and responds to the refreshing baptism by waving harvests of golden beauty. We are told that nature never disappoints, and that nothing pays so well as the soil. In some of her aspects nature appears to be hard and unyielding, but in other aspects she shows herself grateful for all kind attentions. This is the law of nations, and in so far as they answer to this law is their continued prosperity secured. When a nation fails to give out noble exertions for the consolidation of virtuous manhood, for the suppression of vice, and for the spread of right principles, then it begins to decline. The youth of a nation is often the most glorious. Then it produces the greatest number of stalwart heroes. Then are found those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the State. Even then are found the brightest ornaments in literature. The nation is giving. The decline of a nation is marked by this fact, that it is an absorbing power. It rests idly upon former achievements, and does not seek to prosecute further enterprises. Wealth is in abundance. The people absorb, and thus become enervated. This is the law of individuals, and in so far as they obey this law can they hope to reach the true perfection of which they are capable. God gives in order that man may give, and man grows rich by giving. Much has been received. The world itself, with all its exquisite contrivances of infinite wisdom, with all its manifestations of Divine power, and with all its charming

displays of loveliness, is God's gift to man. Life, with all its rare privileges, and wonderful opportunities, and glorious possibilities, has been given by the Creator. Jesus Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, the noblest ideal of our manhood, the Redeemer of mankind, is the gift of God's unspeakable love. Mercy to pardon, grace to help, and love to cheer, come to us from the loving Father. Much has been received, and it is rightly expected that much shall be returned. "Freely ye have received, freely give." What return shall be made for love so vast? Adequate return cannot be made; but oh! that return were made equal to the ability of each recipient. Oh! what shall be the grateful response to beneficence so unspeakably glorious?

That Divine Providence had an eye to this in bringing her to be queen. "Who knows whether thou hast come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" and therefore, "Thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his Church, else thou dost not answer the end of thy elevation." "Thou needest not fear miscarrying in the enterprise; if God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out and give thee success." Now, it appeared, by the event, that she did come to the kingdom that she might be an instrument of the Jews' deliverance, so that Mordecai was right in the conjecture. Because the Lord loved his people, therefore he made Esther queen. There is a wise counsel and design in all the providences of God, which is unknown to us till it is accomplished, but it will prove in the issue that they are all intended for, and centre in, the good

of the Church. The probability of this was a good reason why she should bestir herself, and do her utmost for her people. We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and study to answer that end; and when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generation offers itself, we must take care that we do not let it slip; for we were entrusted with it that we might improve it.—*Matthew Henry.*

We are apt to mistake our vocation by looking out of the way for occasions to exercise great and rare virtues, and by stepping over the ordinary ones that lie directly in the road before us.—*Hannah More.*

There are not good things enough in life to indemnify us for the neglect of a single duty.—*Maul. Swetchine.*

But if thou altogether holdest thy peace. In a storm at sea it is a shame to sit still, or to be asleep, with Jonah, in the sides of the ship when it is in danger of drowning. Every man cannot sit at the stern; but then he may handle the ropes, or manage the oars, &c. The self-seeker, the private-spirited man, may he be but warm in his own feathers, regards not the danger of the house; he is *totus in se*, like the snail still within-doors and at home; like the squirrel, he ever digs his hole towards the sun-rising; his care is to keep on the warm side of the hedge, to sleep on a whole skin, to save one, whatever become of the many. From doing thus, Mordecai deterreth by a heap of holy arguments; discovering an heroic faith and a well-knit resolution.

At this time.—There is indeed a time to keep silence, and a time to speak (Eccles. iii. 7). But if ever a man will speak, let him do it when the enemies are ready to devour the Church: as Cræsus's dumb son burst out into, Kill not King Cræsus. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest," &c. (Isa. lxvii. 1). "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth," &c.

That noble Terentius (general to Valens,

the Emperor), being bidden to ask what he would, asked nothing but that the Church might be freed from Arians; and when the Emperor, upon a defeat by the Goths, upbraided him with cowardice and sloth as the causes of the overthrow, he boldly replied: "Yourself have lost the day, by your warring against God, and persecuting his people."

But thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed.—Here he thundereth, and threateneth her, if to save herself she shall desert the Church. Mordecai's message, like David's ditty, is composed of discords. Sour and sweet make the best sauce; promises and menaces mixed will soonest work. God told Abraham that for the love he bare him he would bless those that blessed him, and curse such as cursed him. Their sin should find them out, and they should rue it in their posterity. As one fire, so one fear, should drive out another.

And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom?—There is often a wheel within a wheel. God may have an end and an aim in businesses that we wot not of nor can see into till events have explained it. Let us lay forth ourselves for him, and labour to be public-spirited, standing on tiptoes, as St. Paul did, to see which way we may most glorify God, and gratify our brethren.—*Trapp.*

Mordecai manifests a precious sense of trust: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." But he who would save his soul shall lose it. The risk which Mordecai called upon Esther to assume, that she should come to the king uninvited, and manifest herself as a daughter of the people thus devoted to destruction, was indeed great and important. Moreover, the hope that Xerxes would recall his edict, thus, according to Persian ideas, endangering the respect due to his royal majesty, and likewise abandoning his favourite minister, was very uncertain of fulfilment. But Esther had been elevated to a high position. Mordecai, who in a doubting manner sends her word: "Who knoweth whether

thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" doubtless did it from a conviction that she must now prove herself worthy of such distinction, if she would retain it. He also conveys the idea that the higher her position the greater her responsibility, and consequently, in case of failure because of carelessness or fearfulness, the more intense her guilt. In these convictions of Mordecai are contained the most earnest exhortations even for us. This is especially true since we are all called to be joint heirs of Jesus Christ to the throne of the heavenly kingdom. In the deportment of Esther a no less reminder is contained. It appears quite natural that Esther should order a fast, not only to be observed by Mordecai and the rest of the Jews, but she also imposed on herself this fast of three days' duration. Had she had a little more of the common discretion of her sex, she would have feared the effects of the fast upon her appearance. Hence she would have adopted quite a different plan or preparation previous to her entrance into the king's presence. Here also she reveals the same attractive feature of mind and manner as when she was first presented to the king. Instead of placing reliance upon what she should externally put on or adorn herself with, we find her trust placed upon something higher. She well knows that she will only succeed if the great and exalted Lord be for her; who, notwithstanding his glorious majesty, yet dwells among the most lowly of men. It is in just such times as these, when we are raised to the greatest endeavours and self-sacrifices, that we must not expect to accomplish these things by our own power, but only through him who in our weakness is our strength. Otherwise, despite our best intentions and most successful beginnings, we shall soon grow discouraged, and fail. Our own weakness is but too often made manifest to our eyes. It is only when we consider and remember that the hand of the Lord is in it all, that we will be saved from a lack of courage.—*Lamp.*

These were, indeed, times for the development of character—times for the

birth of men. And the men were there;—the wit, the poet, the divine, the hero—as if genius had brought out her jewels, and furnished them nobly for a nation's need. Then Pym and Hampden bearded tyranny, and Russel and Sydney dreamed of freedom. Then Blake secured the empire of ocean, and the chivalric Falkland fought and fell. In those stirring times Charnock, and Owen, and Howe, and Henry, and Baxter, wrote, and preached, and prayed. "Cudworth and Henry More were still living at Cambridge; South was at Oxford, Prideaux in the Close at Norwich, and Whitby in the Close of Salisbury. Sherlock preached at the Temple, Tillotson at Lincoln's Inn, Burnet at the Rolls, Stillingfleet at St. Paul's Cathedral, Beveridge at St. Peter's, Cornhill. Men," to continue the historian's eloquent description, "who could set forth the majesty and beauty of Christianity with such justness of thought and such energy of language that the indolent Charles roused himself to listen, and the fastidious Buckingham forgot to sneer." But twelve years before the birth of Bunyan, all that was mortal of Shakespeare had descended to the tomb. Waller still flourished, an easy and graceful versifier; Cowley yet presented his "perverse metaphysics" to the world; Butler, like the parsons in his own 'Hudibras,'—

"Proved his doctrine orthodox
By apostolic blows and knocks."

Dryden wrote powerful satires and sorry plays "with long-resounding march and energy divine;" George Herbert clad his thoughts in quaint and quiet beauty; and, mid the groves of Chalfont, as if blinded on purpose that the inner eye might be flooded with the "light which never was on sea or shore," our greater Milton sang.—*Parishon.*

O the admirable faith of Mordecai that shines through all these clouds, and in the thickest of these fogs deserves a cheerful glimpse of deliverance! He saw the day of their common destruction enacted; he knew the Persian decrees to be unalterable; but, withal, he knew there was a Messiah to come; he was so well acquainted with God's covenanted

assurances to his Church that he can, through the midst of those bloody resolutions, foresee indemnity to Israel, rather trusting the promises of God than the threats of men. This is the victory that overcomes all the fears and fury of the world, even our faith.—*Bishop Hall.*

There shall enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.—O the power of faith! What has it not done!—what can it not do! It is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It lifts the person above the level of his own mind. It can not only see abundance of rain in a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand, but it can prophesy of it, when the heavens above are as burnished brass. The faith of God’s elect has removed mountains—not literally—but mountains of difficulties, and mountains of guilt lying on the conscience, and cast them into the sea; dissipated clouds—not the visible clouds—but clouds of despair which oppress the soul; and dried up fountains—not the fountains of the deep—but the fountains of tears in the heart, which flowed day and night for the slain of the daughter of Zion! Witness its effects on Mordecai. How changed is he from the figure in which we saw him lately. He has shaken the dust from his head, his filthy garments he has exchanged for raiment far surpassing that which the queen had sent him; and the wailings with which he filled the streets of Shushan have been converted into strains of hope and triumph. It is faith—recovered faith—which has set his feet upon a rock, and placed him in a pavilion, from the top of which he looks down with derision on the malice and power and expectation of his enemy, and with compassion on his timid, distracted daughter, whom he alternately chides and comforts.

But what is this faith which produces such astonishing effects? Is it just strong confidence, or a persuasion that what we believe will take place? It has a more solid foundation than this. There is confidence in it, sometimes rising to full assurance, but the word of the immutable God is the base on which the

pillar of faith rests—confidence, the spiral top with which it seeks the skies. On what then did the faith of Mordecai rest? On the promises of God, who “is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said and shall he not do it?—or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

Thou art come to the kingdom—to a crown, to a throne, and in what a wonderful manner! Surely it becomes you to say, with greater reason than David, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” And to add, with the same godly king, “What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?” Born a captive, early left an orphan, lately the reputed daughter of a porter, Providence hath raised thee beyond all men’s expectation, and of none more than your own, to be the second person in the greatest monarchy of the world. Art thou not then bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his Church?

And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—It is possible; it is highly probable. The singular way of thy elevation, and the striking conjunction of circumstances, point to this, and seem to say, Because the Lord loved his people, therefore he made Esther queen, that by her influence with the king she might defeat the wicked plot for their destruction. The very probability of this was a strong incitement to her to bestir herself; for if God had destined her to be the deliverer of Israel, then he would be with her, and give success to her exertions, and this would be an honour greater than the matrimonial crown of Persia; for “henceforth all generations would call her blessed.”

The event showed that Mordecai was right in his conjecture, and that he had correctly interpreted the ways of Providence. There is a wise counsel and design in all the works of him who sees the end from the beginning. It often is unknown to us until it is carried into effect, though we might know more of it if we were more diligent students of

Providence; and the issue proves, that all was intended for, and conduces to, the good of the Church. We should seek to be "workers together with God," and carefully consider for what end he hath put us into the place which we occupy. Have any rank, or authority, or talents, or wealth, or friends? These are the gifts of God, and must be used for his glory. When any special opportunity of serving God and our generation presents itself, we should beware of letting it slip, or excusing ourselves; for an account will be exacted of us, and exacted with impartiality. Of them to whom much is given much shall be required. Every one hath it in his power to do something. "What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" And we should "provoke one another," by our example and our advice, "to love and to good works."—*McCree*.

This lesson may be drawn from his conduct,—that a resolute will, when it is exerted for the accomplishment of any purpose, is usually successful in the end. In the pursuit even of worldly good, when a man keeps his eye steadily fixed upon some one object, and makes that the point towards which his efforts directly and indirectly tend, he commonly succeeds. There are, indeed, providential interpositions which overthrow the most promising and best-laid schemes, and show the insufficiency of human wisdom and power to effect their ends, apart from the blessing of God. But generally, when there is no impious disregard of the order of Providence—a resolute will, combined with activity, sweeps all difficulties out of its path, and succeeds in accomplishing its aims. Some of the greatest movements in worldly affairs are, humanly speaking, to be traced up to this. The triumphs of the Reformation for example, in our own country and in other lands, where it did triumph, while they are really to be ascribed to the overruling providence of God, are instrumentally to be attributed to this, that God raised up and qualified for the work certain men of determined will and unflinching energy, who kept before

them the great purpose which they sought to effect, and would be turned aside by no danger or difficulty from working it out. And I would remark, that in things spiritual—in things affecting the eternal salvation of man—resoluteness of will and indomitable energy are as indispensable as in the pursuit of temporal good. Nothing must be allowed to obscure the great cardinal truth, that salvation is of grace, and that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy." But still, it is only when men, by the grace of God, set themselves resolutely to contend with their spiritual enemies—when, looking to God for help, they will not be driven from the path of well-doing by obstacles which they meet with in pursuing it; it is only then that they are treading the course which will terminate in the rewards of a glorious victory.—*Davidson*.

Ver. 14. "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Their great trouble, their deep distress, and their most deadly danger you have in that (Esther iii. 13). "And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." Here are great aggravations of his cruelty, in that neither sex nor age are spared: rage and malice know no bounds. Haman, that grand informer, with his wicked crew, would have spoiled them of their lives and goods, but that they were prevented by a miraculous providence, as you know. Now in this deep distress and most deadly danger, at what rate doth Mordecai believe? For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement—(Heb. respiration)—and deliverance arise—(Heb. stand up, as on its basis or bottom, so as none shall be able to withstand it). This Mordecai speaketh not

by a spirit of prophecy, but by the power and force of his faith, grounded upon the precious promises of God's defending his Church, hearing the cries of his people arising for their relief and succour, and grounded upon all the glorious attributes of God, viz. his power, love, wisdom, goodness, and all-sufficiency, &c.—all which are engaged in the covenant of grace, to save, protect, and secure his people in their greatest troubles and most deadly dangers. Mordecai's faith in this black, dark, dismal day, was a notable faith indeed, and worthy of highest commendation. Faith can look through the perspective of the promises, and see deliverance at a great distance, salvation at the door. What though sense saith, Deliverance cannot come; yet a raised faith gets above all fears and disputes, and says, Deliverance will certainly come; redemption is at hand.

The Rabbins put Makom, which signifies place, among the names of God. Bythner brings them in expounding that text in Esther, "Deliverance shall arise from another place;" that is, from God. They called him Place, because he is in every place, though in the assemblies of his saints more eminently and gloriously. God is present with all his creatures—(1) *viâ productionis*, by raising them up; (2) *viâ sustentationis*, by staying of them up; they are his family, and he feeds and clothes them; (3) *viâ inclinationis*, by giving unto them power of motion; man could neither live nor move unless the Lord were with him; (4) *viâ observationis*, by taking notice of them; he observeth and marks both their persons and their actions—he sees who they are and how they are employed; (5) *viâ ordinationis*, by governing and ruling of them and all their actions, to the service of his glory, and the good of his poor people.—*Brookes*.

Consider all the capacities and abilities we have to do good, this way and that way, in this relation and that relation, that we may be trees of righteousness, that the more we bear the more we may bear. God will mend his own trees. He will purge them and prune them to "bring forth more fruit." God cherisheth fruitful trees. In the law of Moses,

when they besieged any place, he commanded them to spare fruitful trees. God spares a fruitful person till he have done his work. We know not how much good one man may do, though he be a mean person. Sometimes one poor wise man delivereth the city; and the righteous delivereth the land. We see for one servant, Joseph, Potiphar's house was blessed. Naaman had a poor maid-servant that was the occasion of his conversion. Grace will set anybody a-work. It puts a dexterity into any, though never so mean. They carry God's blessing wheresoever they go, and they bethink themselves when they are in any condition to do good, as he saith in Esther iv. 14. "God hath called me to this place, perhaps for this end." We should often put this *quere* to ourselves, Why hath God called me to this place?—for such and such a purpose.—*Sibbes*.

As it is the most pleasing worship to God to support the Church with all our strength, so he execrates no one more than him who withholdeth from the Church when in danger that help which he is able to render. . . . If the cry of a single poor man is so availing, that although unheard by man it finds an avenging ear in God, what must be the influence of the cry of the whole Church in her affliction imploring assistance from him who it hopes is able to help? . . . This teaches us that God confers power upon princes, riches upon the rich, wisdom upon the wise, and other gifts upon others, not that they may abuse them for their own pleasure, but that they may assist the Church of God, and protect it whatever way they can. For the Church on earth is so great in the eyes of God, that he requires of all men whatever may serve her. "The people," he says, "and the king that will not serve thee shall perish, and the nations shall dwell in a solitary place."—*Brenz*.

"Think not that because thou art in the king's house, thou shalt be safe."—It is vain to trust in kings, or in the sons of men, in whom there is no confidence. Kings die. In that day their breath goes forth, and their thoughts perish. Kings are changeable creatures, like other men. The kings were not like the laws

of the Medes and Persians, which could not be altered. He that was in the morning their favourite, might, before the evening, be hanged by their orders. Herod, king of Judea, dearly loved his wife Mariamme, and yet he ordered her to be put to death without any crime but what was committed in his own dark imagination. Monema was a beloved wife of Mithridates the great King of Pontus, and yet, when he lost a battle against the Romans, that she might not fall into other hands than his own he commanded her to die; and the only favour he showed her was to give her the choice of her own death. Her choice was, to strangle herself by her royal tiara, which had long been hateful to her. But even in this she was disappointed, and her last, or nearly her last, words, were, "Poor bauble! canst thou not do me even this mournful office?"

Jesus forbids us to fear them that have power only to kill the body. Still less, if possible, are we to trust them; for they have no power even to save the body. God is to be trusted and feared. He is the lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy.

Enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews, to the Israel of God, under the gospel, as well as under the law. Amidst all the distresses of the Church, we may rest assured that she cannot perish. Particular Churches may be destroyed, but the Church universal is built by Christ upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.—*Larson.*

Ver. 14. When God vouchsafes his children any outward privileges, he doth it for the good and help of others. Paul had these privileges, that he might beat down the pride of the Jews more powerfully. And Solomon had all abundance of wisdom, riches, and the like. Why? But only that he might without control judge of all, as of "vanity and vexation of spirit;" and make it to be believed more firmly. For had an ordinary man said it, men would have thought it easy for him to say so; but if he had tried them, he would have been otherwise minded. In these later times, our best teachers were at the first Papists, and

of the more zealous sort; as Bucer and Luther, being also learned men; as also Peter Martyr and Zanchius, were brought up in Italy; and all this, that they seeing once their blindness, might be the more able to confound them, as being not a whit inferior to them in any outward respect whatsoever, when they were of their belief.—*Sibbes.*

God never yet suffered any Goliath to defy him, but he raised up a David to encounter him. "The same day Pelagius was born here in Britain, Augustine was born in Africa." Though error, like Esau, hath come out first, yet truth, like Jacob, hath caught it by the heel, and wrestled with it. If God hath suffered any horn to push at his Israel, he hath presently raised a carpenter to knock it off.—*Simeon Ash.*

Things all serve their uses, and never break out of their place. They have no power to do it. Not so with us. We are able, as free beings, to refuse the place and the duties God appoints; which, if we do, then we sink into something lower and less worthy of us. That highest and best condition for which God designed us is no more possible. We are fallen out of it, and it cannot be wholly recovered. And, yet, as that was the best thing possible for us in the reach of God's original counsel, so there is a place designed for us now which is the next best possible. God calls us now to the best thing left, and will do so till all good possibility is narrowed down and spent. And then, when he cannot use us any more for our own good, he will use us for the good of others,—an example of the misery and horrible desperation to which any soul must come, when all the good ends and all the holy callings of God's friendly and fatherly purposes are exhausted. Or, it may be now that, remitting all other plans and purposes in our behalf, he will henceforth use us, wholly against our will, to be the demonstration of his justice and avenging power before the eyes of mankind; saying over us, as he did over Pharaoh in the day of his judgments, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all

the earth." Doubtless, he had other and more genial plans to serve in this bad man, if only he could have accepted such; but, knowing his certain rejection of these, God turned his mighty counsel in him wholly on the use to be made of him as a reprobate. How many Pharaohs in common life refuse every other use God will make of them, choosing only to figure, in their small way, as repro-

bates; and descending, in that manner, to a fate that painfully mimics his. God has, then, a definite life-plan set for every man; one that, being accepted and followed, will conduct him to the best and noblest end possible. No qualification of this doctrine is needed, save the fearful one just named, that we, by our perversity, so often refuse to take the place and do the work he gives us.—*Bushnell.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 15, 16.

A WOMAN'S HEROISM.

A woman, through the delicacy of her constitution and the timidity appropriate to her nature, at first shrinks from the performance of some difficult and dangerous enterprise. Yet when the voice of stern duty calls, when the demands of affection prompt, she shows herself the most heroic of beings. Much has been said, and not too much, about the heroism of woman. A great deal has been sung and written about her heroism. There are also unwritten records of womanly heroism. She has suffered very much in the darkness, in silence, and in obscurity. Not the one half has been told of her heroic glory. While we applaud the heroism of Esther and others whose good deeds have been celebrated in song, let us not forget those whose good deeds are unsung. Esther was no heartless beauty intent on her own elevation, and regardless of the welfare of others. If there is anything repellant in this world it is a beautiful woman that possesses either a heart of stone or a spirit steeped in selfishness. If there is anything attractive in this world it is a maiden the loveliness of whose outward form is but the beautiful casket of a still more lovely soul. How touching to watch the fair maiden meditating with patriotic heart upon the sorrows of her people, and the dangers that threaten her nationality. There is refreshing fragrance in the very sighs that come from her heaving breast. There is healing anodyne in the tears that fall like jewels from those eyes that rain sweet influences. There is vast encouragement in the prayers that ascend from her lips to heaven. The world is bright; we may welcome danger itself, and be the better prepared for calamity, as we see the Esthers of time nobly resolving to step into the places of danger, and undertake the works of deliverance. Esther's heroism then was of the noblest type. She was truly heroic. Let us examine her claims to this character.

I. The greatness of Esther's heroism is shown by her wisdom. Wisdom has been defined to be the use of the best means for attaining the best ends, and in this sense implies the union of high mental and moral excellence. Such a glorious union is manifested in the answer here returned by Esther to Mordecai, and also in the conduct of Esther when she comes to put her well-concerted schemes into operation. A woman's heroism is a grand elevating power. She becomes almost supernatural by the sharpness of her vision, by the quickness of her judgment, by the depth of her wisdom, by the far-reaching nature of her schemes, and by her wondrous skill, and tact, and fertility in the devising of the best means for attaining her ends. What a thrilling history is the history of the expedients devised by heroic women! Talk we of the diplomacy of statesmen, let us talk of the better diplomacy of women devoted to the accomplishment of noble enterprises. Talk we of the skilful arrangements of mighty conquerors, let us talk rather of the arrangements of those women who conquer by the inspiration of heroic daring and heroic consecration. Talk we of the far-reaching and well-devised methods of

scientific men. This we may do, and yet we must feel that great praise is due as we consider the well-devised methods of unscientific but devoted and lofty-souled women.

II. Esther's wisdom is here shown by her recognition of the fact that Divine duties are superior to human laws. "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the laws." Law is a rule of action. It is the formulated expression of one who has a right to command obedience. Kings have a right to command obedience. Subjects however have their rights. And the first rights of a well-regulated and conscientious subject are entitled to respect, and may well dispute the so-called rights of kings; rights that are not based on principles of moral rectitude. There is a power more kingly than that of earthly kings. The Divine law is superior to the human law, and is the true rule of action. All human laws should be in harmony with Divine laws. The voice of conscience is supreme. The voice of earthly legislators is subordinate. "We ought to obey God rather than man." The voice, however, must be the clear, ringing, commanding voice of an enlightened conscience. Cautions must be laid down for fear the rule obtains—so many men so many consciences. The voice of caprice, of prejudice, or of mere self-will may be taken for the voice of conscience. The supposed voice of conscience may tell us to tithe the mint, the anise, and the cummin only; while the true voice commands the observance also of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. The voice of conscience may say, Follow the inner light. Sit in silence and wait for the motions of the Holy Spirit. The true voice proclaims in high places, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them?" If then the voice of conscience and the voice of human institutions oppose one another, we must listen so as to catch the deciding voice of the Divine words. If we cannot clearly discern the message of that voice, we must, like Esther, give ourselves to fasting and to prayer, and God will cause the voice of his own word to ring out more distinctly. Esther's duty in this case was clear, and she showed herself equal to the occasion. There are many cases in life when our duty is clear. Difficulties must not be created as an excuse for cowardice.

III. Esther's heroism and wisdom are here shown by her recognition of the truth that Divine duties must be undertaken in a spirit of self-abnegation. No great work can be successfully accomplished without self-denial. The way to riches, to fame, or to power is in some aspects the way of self-denial. If a man is to be a successful orator he must have the power of self-forgetfulness in the presence of his hearers. This self-forgetfulness is to be obtained by self-denial, by thorough absorption in the subject, and by earnest desire to do good. What is true then of Divine duties is true of what may be called human duties. The one lies on the same plane with the other in so far. Self-denial in the pathway of human duty does not always meet with its appropriate reward. Self-denial in the pathway of Divine duty is never without its harvest. Esther's self-denial was rewarded. It is a very cheap way of getting glory to say "If I perish, I perish" when there is not the slightest chance of perishing. Some people are remarkably heroic when there is no apparent danger. There was danger in Esther's case. There is a sad tone in the declaration "If I perish, I perish," and the sadness is not without its warrant. These words however are not the words of despair. They are the words of one resigned to the Divine will, of one willing to suffer, and yet the words of one who still has hope in Divine protection. If Esther had lived in our day a certain class of companions would have told her not to mind old Mordecai, and let the Jews take their chance. She heeded not such seductive voices. Esther doubtless valued her life; she was not indifferent to the flattering nature of her prospects. She would not wish to be typified by Moses who was taken up to the Mount of Vision in order to see the promised land, and then die without entering into possession. Still she may also have felt that better than the treasure of a Persian palace

is the treasure of a good conscience; better than the life of the body is the life of the soul; better than the glory of a royal position is the glory of self-denial for the good of others. In these words we may find, by no great stretch of imagination, a foreshadowing of that spirit displayed by Christ Jesus, by his apostles, by the martyrs, and by the noble workers of all time. The spirit of him who "pleased not himself," who had a perfect self-surrender, and a complete submission to the Divine will, who bore our sicknesses, and carried our sorrows, finds embodiment and utterance in the words, "If I perish, I perish." The spirit of Esther in this passage indicates the spirit of that noble apostle who counted not his life dear unto him that he might finish his course with joy and the ministry which he had received from the Lord Jesus. It was the spirit of those who rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer such things for his name's sake. It is the spirit of all in every age of the world who are willing to suffer for the good of humanity. Are we prepared at the call of duty and in obedience to the voice of conscience to suffer?

IV. Esther's wisdom is shown in her recognition of the truth that **Divine duties may be undertaken in dependence upon human co-operation.** We may be workers together with God. We may be workers together with one another for the promotion of Divine plans. Those who have to undertake a special Divine mission may be helped by the sympathies and the prayers of others who are not so directly and specially appointed. The minister by his people. The missionary by those who stay at home. Esther by all the praying Jews in Shushan. Co-operation is good in commercial matters. Co-operation is also good in Divine commerce. Let us take the word that speaks of material affairs, that summons up the laws of political economy, and so put its principle to use in things spiritual, that it may become lifted into higher spheres, and clothed with a grander significance. Some people have a one-sided idea of co-operation, especially when any great work is to be done, and when any great sacrifice is to be made. They forget that Co. means two or more. Esther had the true idea of co-operation. She not only asks Mordecai and all the Jews present in Shushan to fast, but she says, "I also and my maidens will fast likewise." There were two sides to this co-operation. Esther and her maids would join with all the Jews in Shushan, in order to bring about a successful result. The Church of to-day needs more co-operation. The minister, for instance, is to go on a difficult mission; he is to fast, and to pray, and to visit, and to be self-denying. All right if it can be secured. Something more is required. True co-operation is needed. The rich member must say, I also will fast, and pray, and give, and work likewise.

V. Esther's wisdom is shown in the recognition of the truth that **Divine duties can only be successfully undertaken by Divine help.** It is vain to make an objection to the Book of Esther on the ground that there is not in it the religious spirit. There can be no point in fasting if it is not connected with religion. This request for a general fast, and this determination on her own part to fast, must have meant an appeal to God for help. Fasting and prayer were very generally joined in the Old Testament writings. In the Book of Joel it is said, "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the elders, and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord!" Mere abstinence from food can be of little service. We may reasonably picture Mordecai carrying out Esther's request, and calling the Jews together to a solemn assembly, and proclaiming a general fast, and national humiliation before God, and earnest prayer to God for success to Esther in her mission. In these modern days we do not believe in fasting. This may be a reaction. It may be a consequence of our objection to those who carry the principle of torturing the body to an extreme. It may, however, be a growth of the luxury of the present times. There is not much disposition now-a-days to keep the body under and bring it into subjection. We have need, however, of deep humiliation before God. The disasters in the nation, the decline of spiritual life in the

Church, call for humiliation. There can be no success without Divine help. We must call mightily unto God. Let us give him no rest until he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Here learn the ennobling, transforming, and creating power of love. Esther's love to her people was strong. This love was a growth from the love she had to God. Let there be love to God, and this will increase all lower loves. True love seeks the enlargement of opportunities; and becomes creative in its very intensity. The loyal and patriotic subject does not strive to pare down the demands of his sovereign. The loving child does not endeavour to strip the father's word of all binding force by skilful manipulations. And the true heart does not inquire, How can I do the very least for my God?—but thinks that the very greatest it can either do or offer is far too little. Oh for a love which, though it has only two mites to give, yet casts them into the treasury of him unto whom belongeth both the gold, the silver, and the copper! Oh for a love which takes the alabaster box of ointment—very precious,—and breaks it over the Saviour's head in loving consecration to his predestined offering! Oh for a love which, though it has only tears to give, yet pours them in plentiful measure on the Saviour's feet, and with the rich tresses of a head, full of grateful thoughts, wipes the tear-bedewed feet of Immanuel!

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 15, 16.

There is something well worthy of remark in the concluding words of Esther: "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish, I perish." This is not the resolution of a fatalist, who acts upon the principle, that what is destined to be must be, and that therefore it is useless either to attempt to ward off evils, or to complain when they have been inflicted. Neither is it the resolution of a person wrought up to a state of absolute desperation, and acting under the impulse of the feeling—"matters cannot be worse, and to have done the utmost may bring relief, while it cannot possibly aggravate the evil." Neither is it the resolution of a person prostrated under difficulties, and yet, with a vague hope of deliverance, saying, "I will make one effort more, and if that fail, and all is lost, I can but die." Esther's purpose was framed in a spirit altogether different from that of any of those persons, although her language appears to be almost the same as they would have used. And there is an actual case recorded in the Scriptures which illustrates the difference. When Samaria was besieged by the Syrians, and the people were dying of famine within the walls, four leprous men, that had their dwelling without the wall, said to one another: "If we enter into the city, famine is in the city, and we shall die

there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now, therefore, come and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive, we shall live: and if they kill us, we shall but die." Here we have men reduced to a state of utter recklessness by suffering, from which, if they did not obtain immediate relief, they must inevitably perish in one way or other, and so they adopted the only course which presented the possibility of relief. But in the case of Esther, we have neither fatalism, nor desperation, nor the listlessness of waning hope, which says, "It matters not what I do." Hers is the heroism of true piety, which, in Providence shut up to one course, and that full of danger, counts the cost, seeks help of God, and calmly braves the danger, saying: "He will deliver me if he hath pleasure in me; if not, I perish in the path of duty." Her noble resolution entitles her to a place among the most eminent of those who wrought out deliverances for Israel.

And now, in conclusion, have not her words peculiar significance when applied to the case of those who, under the burden of their sin, are afraid to come to Christ lest he reject them? Some such we have known. There may be some of them here. Do you feel that you are lost? Do you acknowledge that Christ might justly throw you off, even were

you to cast yourself upon his mercy? And are you now almost without hope? Still we say, his invitations are addressed to sinners, and none need them more than you. You are lost without him; then make the great effort to lay hold of him. Job said: "Though he slay me I will trust in him." You may say: "If I perish I perish, but it shall be at the foot of the cross, looking to Jesus." And I can tell you, my friends, that none ever perished there, putting all their trust in the Lamb of God. Amen.—*Davidson*.

Gospel-consecration does not go farther than this. Everything dear and valued was left behind in order that she might serve God. "All things were counted but loss" that she might maintain "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men." Ah! how this believer, in olden times, when as yet the Saviour was only had in promise, puts to shame many in these latter days who are in possession of the finished salvation! Even the pleasures of sense, and the wealth and rewards of the world, keep them in a state of indecision and vacillation, if not of absolute indifference, to the call and claims of the gospel. They will only go as far with God and his people as it may serve their own selfish ends, and promote their own selfish interests. Self-denial and self-surrender are not words to be found in their vocabulary. But let there be no mistake here. The spirit displayed by Esther is the spirit demanded by the Saviour, and without which we cannot be his disciples. You may not be called upon actually to make the sacrifice, but you cannot dispense with the spirit of readiness to do it. Yea, it must have been already done in spirit, as though in preparation for its actual execution. For the love of Christ, the glory of his name, and allegiance to his crown, we must have laid the world at his feet, and consecrated our life to his service. What were the words which he addressed to the multitudes who went after him? Are they not "hard sayings" when spoken in the midst of his people still? "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, and

his own life also, he cannot be my disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

It may be that you may fall at the post of duty. You have no security against this contingency. The graves of many faithful servants of Christ, at home and abroad, bear testimony to that. But are not the men, who prefer rather to perish at the post of duty than have life prolonged, with a sense of desertion, counted worthy of double honour? The soldier who has kept a perilous position in the field of battle, and has chosen rather to fall than flee; the captain who has gone down with his ship in his anxiety and efforts to save others; and the Christian who has regard to the future rather than to the present, can best afford to sink the life that now is in the life which is to come. The apostles, martyrs, and confessors, who have fallen at the post of duty, shall have no cause to regret their fidelity in heaven. They shall, in consequence, have a more richly jewelled crown, and shine forth in the kingdom with a brighter, fuller glory. And oh! if there should yet come upon the Church dark and cloudy days, when the spirit of persecution and hostility to the people of God, which is not dead but only slumbering, shall again be awakened to try the faith of men and prove their steadfastness, whether in our own times or the times of our children, or children's children, the loss and shame will be theirs who forsake the standard of the Cross, but the honour and recompense be in store for them who are "faithful unto death"—loss and shame to those who will only be able to say on that day "we feared and fled," but honour and recompense to such as will be able to declare "we loved Thee, Lord, more than life; we fought and fell." So, in the spirit of Esther, let us go forward in the path of duty and religion through difficulty, danger, and the fear of death. God will shield us if it is for the good of his Church and his own glory, and "if we perish, we perish."

There is one other reference of the words which, though obvious, we would

not overlook. There are some who deem themselves too sinful to be saved; some whose cup of iniquity is indeed well-nigh full, and who, when aroused to a sense of it, are overwhelmed with terror. What must they do? Whither must they betake themselves? We are not surprised though they should try reformation, for where there is true repentance there will always be renunciation of sin. But let the sinner be in the very agonies of dying, pressed down under the tremendous load of high-handed transgression, and having no time left for reformation of life, what must he do? whither betake himself? We have to announce to him the great truth that "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin," and that "him that cometh unto God through him shall in no wise be cast out." And with these Scriptures syllabled in his ears and lodged in his heart, we have no difficulty in telling him what he must do, and whither he must betake himself. He must go in unto the King—not one whose wrath he has to dread, but in whose redeeming love he has to confide; not waiting till he is better, but urged by the desperation of his case to instant action, and throw himself in all his conscious helplessness on his mercy. O no! There is no hope, no help, no remedy, no refuge for you, but this. Look where you will, try what experiment you may, everything else will be in vain. Your darkness and despair will only be deepened apart from this. But go in unto the King, and even though your darkness be as midnight, there shall gleam forth a star of hope; and though your despair be even as death, there shall be awakened in you the pulsations of a new life. You must perish if you do not. You can but perish if you do. So let your resolve be that of Esther, and Jesus will bid you a cordial and happy welcome. "I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish."—*McEwan*.

Go gather together all the Jews.—Great is the power of joint prayer; it stirs heaven and works wonders. Oh, when a Church full of good people shall set sides and shoulders to work, when they shall rouse up themselves

and wrestle with God, when the pillars of incense shall come up into his presence, and their voices be heard as the voices of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder (Rev. xiv. 2), what may such thundering legions have at God's hands! Have it they will: *Cælum tundimus, preces fundimus, misericordiam extorquemus*, said those primitive prayer-makers (Rev. ix. 13); the prayers of the saints from the four corners of the earth sound, and do great things in the world; they make it ring. It was the speech of a learned man, If there but one sigh come from a gracious heart (how much more, then, a volley of sighs from many good hearts together!) it filleth the ears of God, so that God heareth nothing else.

I also and my maids will fast.—She herself would be at the head of them, as Queen Elizabeth also told her soldiers at Tilbury camp for their comfort; and a Caesar used say to his soldiers, Go we, and not Go ye—non ite, sed eamus; and as Joshua said, I and my house will serve Jehovah (Josh. xxiv. 15). Esther's maids must fast—must fast and pray—or they are no maids for her.—*Trapp*.

"Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own."—*Shakespeare*.

Heroical thoughts do well befit great actions. Life can never be better adventured than when it shall be gain to lose it. There can be no law against the humble deprecation of evils: where the necessity of God's Church calls to us, no danger should withhold us from honest means of relief. Deep humiliation must make way for the success of great enterprises: We are most capable of mercy when we are thoroughly empty. A short hunger doth but whet the appetite; but so long an abstinence meets death half way, to prevent it. Well may they enjoin sharp penances unto others who practise it upon themselves. It was the face of Esther that must hope to win Ahasuerus; yet that shall be macerated with fasting that she may prevail. A careful heart would have pampered the flesh that it might allure those wanton eyes; she pines it that she may please. God, and not she,

must work the heart of the king. Faith teaches her rather to trust her devotions than her beauty.—*Bishop Hall*.

A well-known author once wrote a very pretty essay on the power of education to beautify. That it absolutely chiselled the features ; that he had seen many a clumsy nose and thick pair of lips so modified by that awakening and active sentiment as to be unrecognizable. And he put it on that ground that we so often see people, homely and unattractive in youth, bloom in middle life into a softened Indian summer of good looks and mellow tones. Secular education may do a great deal ; but sacred education will do vastly more. The true beautifying power for woman is the gospel, is that principle of benevolence which it ever infuses. How nobly beautiful, as well as grandly heroic, must Esther have now appeared as she resolves to save her people at the expense of her own life if need be.

It is with him as with Esther in her undertaking for the Jews. If she should go, and the king not hold forth the golden sceptre to her, she was but a dead woman ; but then if she did not go there was no other way to save her and her nation from ruin, and therefore she resolves, "I will go in unto the king, and if I perish I perish :" so here, if I go to Christ (thinks the trembling sinner), and take sanctuary in him, it may be justice may pursue me thither. Oh ! but if I go not, then there is nothing for me but certain destruction ; thereupon he resolves, I will go to Christ, I will lay hold on him, and if I perish I will perish there ; if wrath seize on me, it shall find me in the arms of Christ ; if I die, I will die at his feet. When Joab had fled for refuge to the tabernacle, and caught hold of the horns of the altar, Benaiah, sent to execute him, bids him leave his sanctuary : "Thus says the king, come forth." "Nay," says Joab, "but I will die here ;" if there be no mercy for me, no remedy but I must die, I will die here. Says also the believing soul, but if I must die, I will die here ; if justice smite me it shall smite me with Christ in my arms ; though he kill me, yet will

I rely on him ; here will I live or here will I die ; I will not quit my hold, though I die for it.—*Clarkson*.

The bloody plot being thus laid by Haman, the king's minion, behold the footsteps of God's favourable signal, and eminent presence for his people and with his people in their deadly dangers, and that in raising up in them a very great spirit of faith, prayer, and mourning, and by raising an undaunted courage and resolution in Esther : "And so I will go in unto the king, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther iv. 16). This she speaks not rashly or desperately, as prodigal of her life, but as one willing to sacrifice the same for the honour of God, his cause and people, saying, as that martyr, "Can I die but once for Christ ?" Esther had rather die than shrink from her duty. She thought it better to do worthily and perish for a kingdom, than unworthily and perish with a kingdom. Here was a mighty preference of God in raising Esther's heroic courage and resolution above all those visible dangers that did attend her attempt of going in to the king against the known law of the land.—*Brooks*.

Behold us willing to suffer in this life the worst it may please thee to bring upon us ; here lay thy rod upon us ; consume us here, cut us to pieces here, only spare us in eternity !—*St. Augustine*.

The heroic response of Esther might well send her foster-father home content. It was the full reward of all his care in years gone by to have a daughter worthy of Abigail, and Ruth, and Deborah, and Hannah. She would not act on impulse, but came to a resolution which was not to be put in force for three days. It is an advantage to any one, more to a woman than to a man, to move forward rapidly on the wave of a warm impulse ; but she relinquished that advantage, and looked steadily at the worst issue. "If I perish, I perish." Her resolution was humble and prayerful. Let those who will, despise prayer-meetings and special requests ; remembering the young men of Babylon, and the company in the upper room before Pentecost, believers can afford to sit easy under the world's scorn. "Fast

ye for me : I also and my maids will fast likewise."

That was the secret of Esther's heroism. When the third day came she put on her royal apparel, and did not appear unto men to fast ; but meanwhile there was "another King" to whom she could go without delay, with whom she could remain longer, and to whom she could pour out all her heart. The mere force of contrast with the exclusive monarch of Persia brings up comforting and tender thoughts of the Lord Jesus, who does not debar from his presence the weary and heavy-laden, but bids them come ; who has chosen the contrite heart as his earthly dwelling-place ; who proclaims it as the glory of his home above that there he shall wipe away all tears.

A seraglio is a sad enough place, with its year-long monotony, its petty jealousies, its gilded restraints ; but when, as the curtain now falls, we see Esther, with firm-set lips, going to arrange for a long prayer-meeting with her maidens, we feel that this queen has brought a good thing into a sad place. The religion of the heart is never monotonous. Mordecai also moves homeward with a new light in his strong face, to gather such of his brethren as are within the capital, that they may strengthen one another in seeking "the God of Israel, the Saviour who hideth himself." For three days there is silence. After, we shall see Esther and Mordecai again in their place, acting with plenty of decision and vigour ; but let us not forget this "pause more full than speech," this "hush more sweet than song."—*A. M. Symington, B.A.*

Woman's self-devotion.—Courage is a noble feminine grace—courage and self-devotion. We are so accustomed to associate courage with physical strength that we do not often think of it as pre-eminently a feminine grace when the feminine nature has been fully unfolded and trained, but it is. The reckless rapture of self-forgetfulness, that which dominates and inspires persons and nations, that which is sovereign over obstacle and difficulty and peril and resistance, it has belonged to woman's heart from the beginning. In the early

Pagan time, in the Christian development, in missions and in martyrdoms, it has been shown ; in the mediæval age as well as in our own time ; in Harriet Newel and Florence Nightingale ; in Ann Haseltine as truly and as vividly as in any Hebrew Hadassa or in any French Joan of Arc. You remember the Prussian women after the battle of Jena, when Prussia seemed trampled into the bloody mire under the cannon of Napoleon and the feet of the horses and men in his victorious armies, Prussian women, never losing their courage, flung their ornaments of gold and jewellery into the treasury of the State, taking back the simple cross of Berlin iron which is now the precious heirloom in so many Prussian families, bearing the inscription, "I have gold for iron." That is the glory of womanhood ; that passion, and self-forgetfulness, that supreme self-devotion, with which she flings herself into the championship of a cause that is dear and sacred and trampled under foot. It is her crown of renown, it is her staff of power.—*Dr. Storrs.*

"Fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink for three days."—They were not called with Esther to go in unto the king. A far less dangerous service was required from them. But, what they can do, and are called to do, they must do as conscientiously as Esther. There are many great works which are beyond our strength, or out of the line of our calling ; and yet we may and ought to take a part in them, by strengthening the hands of those who are called to undertake them. Paul had many helpers in his work of the gospel, even among those who could not, or to whom it would not, have been allowed to speak in the Church. We all ought to be fellow-helpers to the truth. When many go abroad to spread the gospel amongst heathens, we find it our duty to continue in the land of our nativity ; but, without removing from it, we may promote the work in which they are employed, by our contributions, or at least by our prayers.

There are some who beg the prayers of others, and yet pray little for themselves. Esther, who requested the Jews

to fast for her, told them that she also would fast, and would abstain as strictly from food as she desired them to do. She had been accustomed to a well-furnished table; but she was not thereby disqualified from afflicting her soul by fasting when she saw it to be her duty. She, no doubt, observed the annual fasts prescribed to the Jews, and she determined to observe this extraordinary fast which she herself prescribed. She hoped to obtain mercy from the Lord, that she might escape death by the laws of Persia, and might be the instrument of the salvation of her people. But, if she miscarried, her fasting and prayer would be proper acts of preparation for her latter end.

"I and my maids will fast."—Some, it is probable, of Esther's maids were heathens when they came into her service. Yet, we find her promising that they would fast. She can answer for them, as Joshua for his household, that they would serve the Lord. If mistresses were as zealous as queen Esther for the honour of God, and the conversion of sinners, they would bestow pains upon the instruction and religious improvement of their female servants. If women may gain to Christ their own husbands by their good conversation, may they not also gain the souls of their servants? and if they are gained to Christ, they are gained to themselves also. Esther expected much benefit from the devotional exercises of her maidens. Paul expected much from the prayers of his converts. Those whom we convert from the error of their ways will be our joy and helpers upon earth: they will be our joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ.

"I and my maids will fast."—Esther could not join in the public prayers of the Jews, when they met together out of many families, to strive together in their prayers to God. But she will fast at home, not only by herself, but with her maidens. There are public fasts in which all are expected to join. There ought likewise to be secret and family fasts observed by us, according to the calls of providence, and the situation of our affairs, or the condition of our souls.

"And then will I go in unto the king,

which is not according to the law."—She would not go in unto the king till she had made her supplication to the Lord, and till the Jews had given her the assistance of their prayers. She was sensible, that though "all men will intreat the ruler's favour, every man's judgment comes from the Lord;" and that the hearts of kings are turned by him according to his pleasure. What, therefore, she desires in the first place is, that she may obtain comfortable assurance of the Divine favour. If the Lord be on her side, she is safe. If the Lord favour her suit, she need not fear the coldness of Ahasuerus, or the mortal enmity of Haman. "The floods may rage. They may lift up their voices and make a mighty noise: but the Lord on high is mightier than the waves of the sea, or the voice of their roaring."

But when the fast is over, she will go in unto the king. She will not think that her duty is done when she has prayed and fasted. She will seek, by the use of proper means, to obtain that blessing which she has been asking. The insincerity of our prayers is too often discovered by our sloth and cowardice. We ask blessings from God, and, as if he were bound to confer them, not according to his own will, but according to ours; we take no care to use those means which he hath appointed for obtaining them, or we do not use them with requisite diligence. Esther will go in unto the king, although she could not go in without violating the laws and risking her life.—*Lawson.*

"He that believeth doth not make haste;" but neither doth he linger like the slothful. Fasting and prayer are preparatives, not substitutes, for active duties. "The Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." Good resolutions, when difficulties and dangers must be broken through, should be speedily performed; and we should not damp them by prolonging religious exercises. Having spent the time allotted to fasting, Esther rose from the ground, laid aside her sackcloth, and put on her royal apparel. The apocryphal additions to this book

represent her as appealing to God, that she always abhorred these signs of her high estate. That her adorning was in the hidden man of the heart, that she did not glory in her crown and embroidered garments, and would have been willing to have thrown them away for the sake of conscience and the good of her people, is all true. But why should she have abhorred them in themselves? There was nothing sinful or necessarily contaminating in their touch; they were given her of God; they were the badge of the rank to which she had been raised; and had she appeared without them, or worn them in an awkward, slovenly manner, she would have dishonoured her husband, and defeated her laudable enterprise. Esther did not adorn herself to attract the regards of Ahasuerus, but because she felt it incumbent on her to appear in a manner becoming her station. There is no sin in persons dressing according to their rank. The king's daughter may be all glorious within, though her garments are of wrought gold; and the plainest and coarsest garb may conceal a proud and haughty spirit.—*Larson*.

Our flesh is always timid when it has to encounter a hazard. My Christ, in his Divine majesty, stands at the entrance into the faith, and sounds the free invitation to each and all, ever

frequent, ever dear, ever happy. One should succour his neighbour in peril and need, and especially the brethren in the faith even at the peril of one's own life. We are born for good not to ourselves, but to others, and thus God oftentimes shows us that through us he aids our own country and the community. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. We may use ordinary prayer for important blessings. Life can never be spent better than when it is the aim to lose it.—*Starke*.

A woman is sometimes wound up to firm and determined action when the lives of her kindred are at stake, which surpasses the marvels of heroic story, and sends a wild pulsation of startled admiration to vibrate through all hearts to the end of time. Who can read of Deborah delivering Israel from ruin without rapture? or Margaret Roper breaking through a London crowd to kiss her father, Sir Thomas More, about to be beheaded? or Joan of Arc—that light of ancient France—who, a mere girl, delivered her country from invaders, and restored the crown to her sovereign at the high altar of Rheims? or

“Her, who knew that love can vanquish death—
Who, kneeling with one arm about the king,
Drew forth the poison with her balmy breath,
Sweet as new buds in spring”?—*B. Kent*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 17.

A GOOD MAN'S CHARACTERISTICS.

I. Mordecai went his way pondering. Mordecai was a man of thought, as is plainly seen from the whole course of this narrative. His course of conduct was evidently the result of intense thought. And this was a special occasion for thought. He would still require to ponder deeply, for we must think not only to form our plans, but also after our plans are on their way to accomplishment. This is characteristic of a good man, that he thinks. David often speaks of thinking. “When I thought to know this.” “I thought on my ways.” The prophets were men of thought. The question was asked, “How knoweth this man letters, or learning, having never learned.” The answer may be given—that Jesus was supernaturally endowed, and he exercised himself to acquire knowledge. He studied the Old Testament writings, and the ways of men. He thought. He increased in wisdom. There was mental development in the man Christ Jesus. The apostles thought. Goodness is helpful to, and is the provocative of, thought. It enables the mind to see clearly. It stimulates the mind to think deeply. To pray well is to study well. To live in the pure atmosphere of goodness is to

enlarge the nature. Professedly good men should seek to think more. There is a want of strenuous thinking in the present day. We do not ponder. We muse. We sentimentalize. We indulge in sentiment for the mere luxury of excitement. There is further a want of thinking for others. Our thoughts are too much centred on self. Mordecai thought for his people.

II. Mordecai went his way believing. The man of faith finds that the occasions of life increase his faith. The movements of Providence tend to strengthen his confidence. We have seen that Mordecai was a man of faith, and here in Esther's answer he finds encouragement to keep on believing. His faith lived through, and was not destroyed by, Esther's apparent refusal, and now his faith is wonderfully enlarged by Esther's gracious answer of determination to make the venture. He believed before that enlargement and deliverance would arise from another place, and now he believes still more strongly that God will save his anointed. God has given enlargement already by rewarding Mordecai's faith, and giving him fresh reasons for confidence. The faith of the Christian is not killed by the trials of life, and is developed by the occasional tokens of Divine interposition. Faith leads to more faith. It is strengthened by the storm. It ripens in the calm. It surmounts discouragements. It finds encouragement where there may be little to be seen by doubt. It gathers food in the most barren spots. It turns the sterile rock into a garden of promise. It never sinks beneath the billows, for it firmly grasps the hand of omnipotence. Lord, we believe, but our faith is weak. Oh, help our unbelief! Give signs and tokens of thy presence that doubting ones may become believing ones. Rise up in these modern times heroes of faith. Oh, let the mighty power of faith be again manifested! The world requires a fresh race of heroes who shall through faith subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, obtain promises, and wax valiant in moral fights.

III. Mordecai went his way obeying. Faith without works is dead. Mordecai did according to all that Esther had commanded him. He saw that Esther's command was in harmony with the command of God, and therefore he obeyed. Two things are to be taken into consideration with reference to earthly commands. Who commands? What is the nature of the commandment? There is a *primæ facie* objection against the commands of some. They are not noted either for wisdom or for piety. We very soon settle in our minds as to their utterances. Esther possessed both wisdom and piety. Mordecai might therefore very properly consider the nature of her requirements. However, it is human to err. The best people make mistakes. We have, then, to examine all commands. It is to be presumed that Mordecai examined the command of Esther and saw its propriety. There is no need to examine the propriety of the commandments of God. His commandments are not grievous. All his laws are right. All his requirements are the result of wisdom. Therefore let us obey promptly and persistently. Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice. Here note that God gives credit for an action when the true purpose is found in the mind to do the commandment. While Mordecai is on his way to gather together all the Jews that were present in Shushan, he may be said to do according to that which Esther had commanded. God takes notice of good intentions, of holy resolves, as well as of actual performances. Death may intervene between the resolve and its execution on earth; but death cannot prevent the holy resolution being developed in heaven, death cannot rob the earnestly resolving soul of its Divine reward. Death may seem to kill the noble purpose, but there is a sphere where death has no power and where the noble purposes of earth may fructify. In this aspect heaven is the complement of earth. It is man's to resolve and to do so far as possible. God will rightly perfect that which concerneth his saints.

IV. Mordecai went his way praising. It is not a great stretch of imagination to suppose Mordecai praising God for his goodness on his way from the palace-gates. He would naturally praise God for the readiness with which Esther now

entered upon the difficult enterprise. We must praise God not only for the accomplished deliverance, but when the deliverance is being accomplished. Prayer must be joined with praise. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God. Some cannot see an opportunity for praise when it is a season of fasting and prayer. "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast; verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 17.

So Mordecai went his way, and did according, &c.—As he had put her upon a dangerous, but, as the cause stood, necessary, exploit (nature will venture its own particular good for the general, as heavy things will ascend to keep out vacuity, and preserve the universe); so he is ruled by her (though a woman, and once his pupil) when he perceived her counsel was good. Abraham must hear Sarah, and David Abigail, and Apollos Priscilla, when they speak reason. It is foretold of a man in Christ, that a little child shall lead him.—*Trapp.*

So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.—Mordecai commanded Esther, and she obeyed him. Esther commanded Mordecai, and he obeyed her. They served one another in love. It would be happy for us if we knew how to command and how to obey in our turns, being subject one to another in the fear of God.

Mordecai required the Jews to fast three days according to Esther's orders; and we have no reason to doubt of their ready and grateful compliance. They would not think it hard, but necessary and useful, to be called to afflict their souls to an extraordinary degree, when their lives and the lives of all their people were in question. And yet the present life of all the many thousands of Judah was not of equal importance to the eternal life of one precious soul. What, then, are we to think of ourselves, if the sentence of eternal death denounced against every sinner, has never induced us to devote as many hours to fervent prayer, as these Jews employed days in

prayer and fasting to obtain deliverance from temporal death? Is it not to be feared that we do not really believe what the Scripture tells us about that judgment which is come upon all men to condemnation, if we think it too much trouble to spend some hours or days in considering our condition, and pouring out supplications for that mercy which we so greatly need. The Jews fasted. Esther went in to the king, uncertain about the event, but pressed by hard necessity. Necessity is laid upon sinners, yea, woe unto them if they do not obtain mercy! But great encouragement is given them to come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy. God himself puts words into their mouths, and will he not hear those prayers which are dictated by his own Spirit? (Hos. xiv. 2, 3; Jer. xxxi. 18—20.)—*Lawsen.*

Ver. 17. That which belongs to us in our calling is care of discharging our duty; that which God takes upon him is assistance, and good success in it. Let us do our work, and leave God to do his own. Diligence and trust in him is only ours, the rest of the burden is his. In a family the father's and the master's care is the greatest; the child's care is only to obey, and the servant's to do his work; care of provision and protection doth not trouble them. Most of our disquietness in our calling is, that we trouble ourselves about God's work. Trust God and be doing, and let him alone with the rest. He stands upon his credit so much, that it shall appear we have not trusted him in vain, even when we see no appearance of doing any good. Peter fished all night, and caught

nothing, yet upon Christ's word he casts in his net again, and caught as many fish as brake his net. Covetousness, when men will be richer than God would have them, troubles all; it troubles the house, the whole family, and the house within us, our precious soul, which should be a quiet house for God's Spirit to dwell in, whose seat is a quiet spirit. If men would follow Christ's method, and "seek first the kingdom of heaven," all other things would be cast upon them. If thoughts of insufficiency in our places discourage us, remember what God saith to Moses, when he pretended disability to speak, "Who hath made man's mouth? have not I, the Lord!" All our sufficiency for every calling is from God.

God is never nearer his Church than when trouble is near. Usually, after the lowest ebb follows the highest spring-tide. Christ stands upon Mount Zion.

There is a counsel in heaven that will dash the mould of all contrary counsels on earth; and, which is more, God will work the raising of the Church by that very means by which his enemies seek to ruin it. God gave too dear a price for his Church to suffer it long in the hands of merciless enemies. Take heed therefore of fretting, because of the man that bringeth wicked devices to pass, for the arms of the wicked shall be broken. The depths of misery are never beyond the depths of mercy. God oft, for this very end, strips his Church of all helps below, that it may only rely upon him, and that it may appear that the Church is ruled by a higher power than it is opposed by. And then is the time when we may expect great deliverances in the Church, when there is a great faith in the great God.—*Sibbes*.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 3. *The patriotic Greek*. Be like that patriotic Greek, who with his little band of followers had to check the great army of the Persians. He knew that to go down into the open plain and to expose himself there to all his enemies at once would be speedy destruction. He therefore took his stand in the narrow mountain pass, and encountered his foes as they came one by one. So be it with you. Keep to the narrow pass of to-day. Face your troubles one by one as they arise. Do not commit yourself to the open plain of to-morrow. You are not equal to that. God does not require you to do that.—*Spurgeon*.

Haman may not have the power to carry out his bloody and revengeful decree. God will interpose in a wonderful method to your deliverance. Face for the present only the trouble caused by the proclamation, and do not ask how will it be when the time comes for the proclamation to take effect.

Ver. 3. *Unskilful persons in a boat*. I have seen young and unskilful persons sitting in a boat, when every little wave sporting about the sides of the vessel, and every motion and dancing of the barge, seemed a danger, and made them cling fast upon their fellows; and yet all the while they were as safe as if they sat in a tree, while the gentle wind shook the leaves into refreshment and cooling shade. And so the unskilful, inexperienced Christian shrieks out whenever his vessel shakes, thinking it always danger that the watery pavement is not stable and resident like the rock; and yet all his danger is in himself, none at all from without; for he is indeed moving upon the waters, but fastened to a rock; faith is his foundation, and hope his anchor, and

death is his harbour, and Christ his port, and heaven his country; and all the evils of poverty, or affronts of tribunals and evil judges, all fears and sad anticipations, are bent like the loud wind blowing from the right point; they make a noise and drive faster to the harbour.

Ver. 3. *Sour milk and black bread*. We had traversed the Great Aletsch Glacier, and were very hungry when we reached the mountain tarn half-way between the Bel Alps and the hotel at the foot of the Aeggischorn; there a peasant undertook to descend the mountain, and bring us bread and milk. It was a very Marathon to us when he brought us back milk too sour for us to drink, and bread black as a coal, too hard to bite, and sour as the curds. What then? Why, we longed the more eagerly to reach the hotel towards which we were travelling. We mounted our horses, and made no more halts till we reached the hospitable table where our hunger was abundantly satisfied. Thus our disappointments on the road to heaven whet our appetites for the better country, and quicken the pace of our pilgrimage to the celestial city.—*Spurgeon*.

Ver. 4. *Hardening effects of sensibility*. The frequent repetition of that species of emotion which fiction stimulates tends to prevent benevolence, because it is out of proportion to corresponding action; it is like that frequent "going over the theory of virtue in our thoughts," which, as Butler says, so far from being auxiliary to it, may be obstructive of it. As long as the balance is maintained between the stimulus given to imagination with the consequent emotions, on the one hand, and our practical habits, which those emotions are chiefly designed to form and strengthen,

on the other, so long the stimulus of the imagination will not stand in the way of benevolence, but aid it; and, therefore, if you will read a novel extra now and then, impose upon yourself the corrective of an extra visit or two to the poor, the distressed, and afflicted! Keep a sort of debtor and creditor account of sentimental indulgence and practical benevolence. I do not care if your pocket-book contains some such memoranda as these: For the sweet tears I shed over the romantic sorrows of Charlotte Devereux, sent three basins of gruel and a flannel petticoat to poor old Molly Brown; For sitting up three hours beyond the time over the "Bandit's Bride," gave half-a-crown to Betty Smith; My sentimental agonies over the pages of the "Broken Heart" cost me three visits to the Orphan Asylum and two extra hours of Dorcas Society work; Two quarts of caudle to poor Johnson's wife, and some gaberlines for his ragged children, on account of a good cry over the pathetic story of the "Forsaken One." If the luxury of sympathy and mere benevolent feeling be separated from action, then Butler's paradox becomes a terrible truth, and the heart is not made better, but worse, by it. Those who indulge in superfluous expression of sentiment are always neophytes in virtue at the best; and, what is worse, they are very often among the most heartless of mankind. Sterne and Rousseau were types of this class,—perfect incarnations of sensibility without benevolence,—having, and having in perfection, the "form" of virtue, but "denying the power thereof."—*Greyson's Letters*.

Ver. 5. *Eudocia and Chrysostom*. When Queen Eudocia angrily threatened Chrysostom with banishment, he calmly replied: "Go tell her I fear nothing but sin. He who serves God need fear nothing so much as sin." It is as Christ Jesus is born in the heart that we are made free from the slavery of sin, and become the servants of God. This is the sign of the new birth, that the man is afraid of sin. The man who serves God may well be delivered from all slavish fear.

Ver. 5. *Saxon serfs*. Just as the king's livery frees the wearer of it from certain civil penalties and taxes; just as in our Saxon institutions the serfs of the crown were noble; so it is with Christians. The serfs of Jesus Christ are the truest nobles. They rise above all other kind of nobility. The wearers of heaven's livery, those who bear in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus, ought to be free from men. They are to be free from men, free from the world, free from cares, free from self and sin. What a liberty is this! The more we are enslaved the more we are set free. The more serfdom the more liberty. —*Maclaren*.

Ver. 5. *Dead swine good*. To do a few good works at our death only, it is a swinish doing good. The swine will do good when he is dead. Then there is profit of his flesh, though all his life he were noisome. Those men that put off thus, they are rather swine than men, beastly men. God seldom accepts the good they do then, and it is a forced good. If they were not to die then, no good at all would be done. That they

do is because they can keep it no longer. It shows they have no grace nor faith at all; for if there had been faith to depend upon God they would have done good before. But we must serve God in our generation if we will be saved.

—*Sibbes*.

Ver. 5. *Church-door religion*. That is no religion that is left behind in the Church; as Lactantius saith, that is no religion that we leave behind when we come to the Church door. But that is religion when we leave our duty here, and carry it in our breasts to practise it every day in the week; when we show it in our places. That is the service of God. It is not the matter or stuff, but the stamp, that makes the coin; so it is not the work, but the stamp, that makes it a service. Let the king set a stamp but upon a brass, yet it will go for current if it have the king's stamp upon it. Let it be but an action of our callings, if it have God's stamp upon it, it is a "service" of God. Our whole life, not only in the Church, but in our particular places, may be a "service of God."—*Sibbes*.

Ver. 5. *Cardinal Wolsey*. The following was his last charge:—"Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away thy ambition. By that sin fell the angels. How can man, then, the image of his Maker, hope to win by it? Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee; still in thy right hand carry gentle peace, to silence envious tongues. Be just, and fear not. Let all the ends thou aimest at be thy country's, thy God's, and truth's; then, if thou fallest, oh, Cromwell! thou fallest a blessed martyr. Serve the king; and, pray thee, lead me in. There take an inventory of all I have, to the last penny: 'tis the king's; my robe, and my integrity to heaven, is all I dare now call mine own. Oh, Cromwell, Cromwell! had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies."

Ver. 6. *Sermon to one hearer*. The well-known American divine, Dr. Beecher, once engaged to preach for a country minister on exchange, and the Sabbath proved to be one excessively stormy, cold, and uncomfortable. It was in mid-winter, and the snow was piled all along in the roads, so as to make the passage very difficult. Still the minister urged his horse through the drifts, put the animal into a shed, and went into the little rural chapel. As yet there was no person in the place, and, after looking about, the preacher took his seat in the pulpit. Soon the door opened, and a single individual walked up the aisle, looked about, and took a seat. The hour came for commencing service, but no more hearers appeared. Whether to preach to such an audience was a question, and it was one that Lyman Beecher was not long deciding. He went through all the services, praying, singing, preaching, and the benediction, with only one hearer. When all was over, he hastened down from the desk to speak to his "congregation," but he had departed. Travelling in Ohio, twenty years afterwards, the doctor alighted from the stage one day in a pleasant village, when a gentleman stepped up then, and spoke to him, familiarly calling him by name. "I do not remember you," said the Doctor. "I

suppose not," said the stranger; "but we once spent two hours together in a house alone in a storm." "I do not recall it, sir," added the old man; "pray when was it?" "Do you remember preaching, twenty years ago, in such a place, to a single person?" "Yes, yes," said the doctor, grasping his hand, "I do, indeed; and if you are the man, I have been wishing to see you ever since." "I am the man, sir; and that sermon saved my soul, made a minister of me, and yonder is my church. The converts of that sermon, sir, are all over Ohio."

Ver. 7. *Sidney Smith*. Sidney Smith once said there would be a great many more good Samaritans in the world if it were not for the oil and for the twopence.

Some one went to Theodore Hook, and told him that a certain friend of theirs was in want of money. "How much?" he asked. "Well," said the other, "I think a three and two noughts will set him right." On this Hook remarked, "He is a right good fellow; I tell you what I'll do, I'll give him one of the noughts."

Ver. 8. *Bunyan's wife*. Her heroic achievements on behalf of her husband are admirably related by Bunyan. She travelled to London with a petition to the House of Lords, and intrusted it to Lord Barkwood, who informed her that they could not interfere, the king having committed the release of the prisoners to the judges. Several times she appeared before them: love to her husband, a stern sense of duty, a conviction of the gross injustice practised upon one to whom she was most tenderly attached, overcame her delicate, modest, retiring habits, and forced upon her this strange duty. This delicate, courageous, high-minded woman appeared before Judge Hale, who was most affected with her earnest pleading. It was the triumph of love, duty, and piety, over bashful timidity. Bunyan's wife in pleading with the judge for his liberty, said, "My lord, I have four small children that cannot help themselves, of which one is blind, and have nothing to live upon but the charity of good people." Her energetic appeals were in vain; and with bitter feelings she returned to the prison, believing that it would be the tomb of her beloved husband.

Ver. 8. *Queen Philippa*. After the surrender of the town of Calais to King Edward III. he granted to the inhabitants their lives, but expelled them from the town, and demanded that six of the richest burghesses should be delivered up to his vengeance: Eustace de St. Pierre, John Dacre, James and Peter Wisart, and two others whose names history does not record, nobly volunteered to resign their lives for the safety of their fellow-citizens, and dressed only in their shirts, went barefoot, with halters round their necks, to present the keys of the town to Edward, who ordered them to immediate execution; but the prayers and entreaties of the queen procured their pardon. She then ordered clothes to be brought them, entertained them in her tent, and dismissed them with presents.

Ver. 14. *Buonaparte's activity*. It is noticed by some writer concerning Buonaparte, that he never went into town or city or country new to

him, but immediately he was examining and considering the best place for a castle or a camp, for an ambushment or an attack, for the means of defence or annoyance. Thus he was not waiting, but always seeking to be in preparation. Those who profess to have nobler ends in view should always be planning new methods by which to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Ver. 14. *Not sick when duty calls*.

"Brutus, O, what a time have you chose out, brave Caius, to wear a kerchief! Would you were not sick!"

Ligarius. I am not sick, if Brutus have in hand any exploit worthy the name of honour.

Bru. Such an exploit have I in hand, Ligarius, had you a healthful ear to hear of it.

Lig. By all the gods that Romans bow before, I here discard my sickness! Soul of Rome! Brave son, deriv'd from honourable loins! Thou, like an exorcist, hast conjured up My mortified spirit. Now bid me run, And I will strive with things impossible; Yea, get the better of them. What's to do?"

This is the spirit which the servant of God should both possess and manifest. Not sick when duty calls. Ready to run where danger thickens, and where honourable exploits are to be performed for God's glory. No need to wait long and ask what's to do in this world of sin and of misery. Oh, that the Holy Spirit, that Divine exorcist, would conjure up the mortified spirits of men morally sick, that they may be valiant to get the better of things impossible!

Ver. 14. *The teaching of children*. These things Mordecai urges to Esther; and some of the Jewish writers, who are fruitful in invention, add another thing which had happened to him which he desired she might be told, "that going home, the night before, in great heaviness, upon the notice of Haman's plot, he met three Jewish children coming from school, of whom he inquired what they had learned that day. One of them told him his lesson was, Be not afraid of sudden fear; the second told him his was, Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; the third told him his was, I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry and deliver you. "O the goodness of God," says Mordecai, "who out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ordains strength!"—*Matthew Henry*.

Ver. 14. *The shepherd crushed by the rock*. I remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where beneath a tall black cliff, all weather-worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at the foot, resting on the greensward that creeps round its base, a huge rock that has fallen from the face of the cliff. A shepherd was passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle, and it fell, and the man that was beneath it—is there now! Ground to powder! Ah, my brethren, that is not my illustration—that is Christ's. Therefore, I say to you, since all that stand against him shall become "as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor," and be swept utterly away, make him

the foundation on which you build; and when the rain sweeps away every "refuge of lies," you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of Ages.—*A. McLaren.*

CONSECRATION HYMN.

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and "beautiful" for thee.
Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.
Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.
Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.
Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

F. R. Havergal.

Ver. 16. *Not necessary to live.* Sibbes says: "It is necessary we should be just; it is not necessary we should live." This saying is enforced and illustrated by one of the gems of Dr. Samuel Johnson preserved by Boswell. A man who was engaged in a disreputable business was defending himself against the sarcasms of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and pleaded, "he must live." "Not at all, sir; there is no necessity for *your* living," was the memorable reprimand by way of response. Esther felt that duty must be done. It was not necessary for her to live, but it was necessary that an effort should be made to thwart a cruel and vindictive edict.

Ver. 16. *A true hero.* The city of Marseilles in France was once afflicted with the plague. So terrible was it that it caused parents to desert children, and children to forget the obligations to their own parents. The city became as a desert, and funerals were constantly passing through its streets. Everybody was sad, for nobody could stop the ravages of the plague. The physicians could do nothing, and as they met one day to talk over the matter and see if something could not be done to prevent this great destruction of life, it was decided that nothing could be effected without opening a corpse in order to find the mysterious character of the disease. All agreed upon the plan, but who would be the victim, it being certain that he should die soon after? There was a dead pause. Suddenly one of the most celebrated physicians, a man in the prime of life, arose from his seat and said: "Be it so, I devote myself to the safety of my country. Before this numerous

assembly I swear, in the name of humanity and religion, that to-morrow at the break of day I will dissect a corpse, and write down as I proceed what I observe." He immediately left the room, and as he was rich, made a will, and spent that evening in religious exercises. During the night a man died in his house of the plague, and at daybreak the following morning, the physician, whose name was Greyon, entered the room, and critically made the examination. He then left the room, threw the papers into a vase of vinegar, so that they might not convey the disease to another, and retired to a convenient place, where he died in twelve hours.

Ver. 16. *Devotion of Arminius to his work.* As James Arminius passed along one of the poorer districts of the city, he heard a certain lowly dwelling resound with the voice of wailing. Immediately on perceiving that the whole of that household had been seized with the plague, and were in torment arising from the most burning thirst, he not only gave money to the neighbours, who were standing by, with which to purchase a draught, but further, when not one of them dared to enter that infected abode of poverty, he himself, heedless of every danger to which by this step he exposed himself and those dear to him, intrepidly walked in, and imparted refreshment, at once for the body and the soul, to every single member of this afflicted family.—*Brandt's Life of Arminius.*

The Findern flower. Sir Edmund Burke was writing a book, and he went to the North, to inquire particulars of a certain family named Findern. But he could find no account of them remaining—no memorial, no hall in ruins. He asked a working man if he could tell him anything about the family, and he said he could show him the Findern flower—a small blue flower, said to have been imported into England by Sir Joshua Findern on his return from the Crusades. It springs up, and never dies. It grows nowhere else in England, but here it cannot be eradicated. Benevolence is a beautiful flower; like the Findern flower it need never die; unlike the Findern flower it can flourish anywhere. It may grow in palace or in cottage, in the hot-house or in the cold night of an Arctic winter. This flower flourished in the nature of Esther, and how beautiful it looked, what sweet fragrance it imparted, what glorious colours it unfolded!

Ver. 16. *Everything to die for.* A correspondent relates this suggestive incident:—"We recently called on a lady of culture and refinement, who, having just taken possession of a new house with elegant surroundings, had suddenly been called to face the approach of a fearful disease that seemed beyond human power to avert. With a loving husband and winsome daughter, with a home filled with evidences of wealth and taste, encircled by warm, true-hearted friends, with everything earthly to make life glad and joyous, we remarked: 'You have everything to live for. Does it not depress you to think that all this must be given up if this disease is not stayed?' The reply, simple, earnest, truthful, 'Why, I have everything to die for,' indicated the rich, abiding wealth of a soul

whose trust is stayed on God, and showed that she was lifted up into a life of serenity and peace that could never be shaken by storms and tempests. Can any faith or any religion, save that of the Christian, enable one thus to triumph over pain, thus to look upon death, thus to contemplate separation from the dear ones linked by the holiest of earthly ties! All things to die for! Reunion with friends who long since left us; pain and suffering only memories of a former past; complete and eternal freedom from sin; complicity with unseen power of evil at an end; the presence of the pure and the holy; communion with him who shall wipe all tears from our eyes; at home and at rest for ever with the Lord—was not the remark of our friend most emphatically true? On the grandeur and the beauty of that faith which sees through the rifted clouds the glory beyond, which can say amid deepest darkness, ‘The morning cometh;’ that faith which with ‘things seen and temporal,’ most beautiful and attractive, can raise up into a full appreciation of ‘the things that are unseen and eternal;’ that faith which bridges over the dark river, enabling the believer to tread with firm footstep and alone the way that leads to the unknown land; that faith which will lead one encircled by richest earthly gifts, to say: “I have everything to die for!”

Esther had everything to live for according to human estimates, yet she was willing to die.

Ver. 16. *A young Illinois hero.* An American paper chronicles a bit of heroism by a Peoria county boy which deserves recognition. A coal shaft is being sunk just north of Hollis, Illinois, and the other day a workman, by the name of Harland, lighted a slow match leading to the blast, and then signalled to be drawn up. The

depth of the shaft was seventy feet. When he had been raised fourteen feet he struck the bottom of a board partition, and was thrown back to the bottom. Thomas Crandall, a step-son of Harland, was a witness to the accident, and promptly slid down the rope, seventy feet, and tore the match from the fuze in time to prevent an explosion. The act was a brave one, scarcely to be paralleled. The boy's hands were terribly lacerated by the friction of the rope. The step-father was rescued with a broken rib and other severe bruises. The heroic act of this brave boy can be not only “paralleled,” but surpassed. Esther exposed herself to equal risk to save a whole people to whom she was bound by the ties of nationality.

Ver. 16. *The Grace Darling of Berstead.* The sea-coast Sussex village of Berstead, adjacent to Bognor, is justly proud of Mrs. Wheatland, a brave and strong middle-aged matron, the mother of a large family, who has saved thirteen lives in the past twenty years, by swimming out to the rescue of drowning bathers. So here are no less than thirteen lives which our good, strong Mary Wheatland has saved. How many more there may have been “goodness knows;” for she looks on life-saving as part of her regular business—and she found it hard to tax her memory even with these examples. Thus her splendid conscience is hung with immortal but immaterial medals. She has never sought any from the Humane Society, nor does she seem to think she has done anything meritorious or worthy of human distinction. How many lives Esther has saved we cannot tell; she saved them at the risk of her own—“If I perish I perish.” Surely her splendid conscience was hung with immortal but immaterial medals. Surely the Jews are right in perpetuating the glory of her name.

CHAPTER V

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. **The third day]** must be counted from the day of the transaction between the queen and Mordecai; the first day being that on which it took place. The fasting, then, would not begin till midday; and on the third day Esther went to the king to invite him on that day to a banquet, which would surely take place in the forenoon. Thus the three days' fast would last from the afternoon of the first to the forenoon of the third day, *i. e.* from 40 to 45 hours.—*Keil.* **Put on royal apparel]** Lit. put on royalty; the expression signifies royal dignity; appeared as became the great occasion. **The inner court of the king's house]** This must have been situated directly in front of the royal audience chamber, or “throne room,” where the monarch was wont to sit when receiving ministers of state, and attending to the business of the empire.—*Whedon's Com.* 2.] The king held out the golden sceptre as a token of his favourable disposition; and Esther drew near and touched the top of the sceptre; probably kissed it, as the Vulgate renders the word. 3. **What wilt thou, queen Esther?]** Rather, what ails thee? According to Herodotus (ix. 109), Xerxes, when pleased with one of his wives, offered to grant her any request whatever, without hesitation.—*Railtonson.* 4.] For the present she requests nothing further than that the king and Haman should come to the banquet she had prepared. She desired Haman to be present, in order, as Calov remarks, that she might charge him by name in the presence of the king with the decree surreptitiously obtained against the people, and to his very face cut off every possibility of evasion; perhaps also in order to make his confusion the more complete. 6. **And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine]** After the meats were removed it was customary in Persia to continue the

banquet for a considerable time with fruits and wine (Herod. 1, 333). During this part of the feast the king renewed his offer.—*Racolinson*. The king understood that there was some request besides the mere coming to her banquet. 7, 8.] **Esther answered, My petition and my request; If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said]** *i. e.* make known my request. She did not esteem the time an appropriate one for expressing her request. 9.] Haman was joyful at the thought of receiving such honour from the king and queen; but the greatness of his joy rendered him still more indignant at Mordecai for his stubborn refusal to show outward tokens of respect. 10.] However, Haman refrained himself till he could consult his friends and his wife Zeresh. His friends—his intimate associates and companions—diviners and wise men—with whom he met in councils and in festivities.—*Hedon's Com.* 11. **The multitude of his children]** From ix. 7—10 we learn that Haman had ten sons; and many sons were not looked upon as a great blessing from God by the Israelites only, but were also esteemed a signal prosperity among the Persians, the king annually sending presents to him who had the greatest number of sons.—*Keil*. 12.] Haman had also the honour of being invited to the banquet alone. 13.] And yet all his good fortune is embittered to him as often as he sees the hated Jew, Mordecai. The fact that such a Jew may defy him unpunished seems to be a counter-proof against his dignity and power. 14. **Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, &c.]** The name Zeresh is probably connected with Zered Zara, “gold.” Compare the Greek *chrysis*.—*Racolinson*. Zeresh led the counsel. Kings as well as their chief officers doubtless often allowed themselves to be directed by their wives. **Let a gallows]** Heb. a tree, or wood; that is, a lofty beam or post for impalement; not a gallows, or gibbet, in the ordinary sense. Hanging with a rope by the neck seems not to have been a Persian mode of punishment, but impalement was common. Haman's wife and friends proposed to make the post of wood for Mordecai's execution fifty cubits high—seventy-five feet—so as to make his impalement as conspicuous and as ignominious as possible. Feuillant well says: “But why make it so high? (*i. e.* the tree, gallows). In order that his disgrace might be plainly observable to the eyes of all, and the more striking. Wherefore should he be in such haste about it? Lest there should be danger in delay or procrastination. For what reason have it erected before his own house? So that he and all his family, going in and out, seeing Mordecai hanging, might mock and feast their cruel eyes and minds with so miserable and foul a spectacle.”

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1, 2.

THE ROYALTY OF FAITH.

WATSON says—“True faith is prolific, it brings forth fruit; faith hath Rachel's beauty and Leah's fruitfulness.” Esther's faith in this instance gave to her more than Rachel's beauty and Leah's fruitfulness. It enhanced the claims of her natural beauty. It gave inexpressible sweetness to her sadness. It surrounded her with an irresistible grace. Leah's fruitfulness was of a natural character; Esther's fruitfulness was moral. Let us now consider the royalty of Esther's faith, and may it stimulate us to seek more earnestly to be invested with this royal apparel, and inwardly strengthened with this royal grace.

I. Royal apparel may cover a sad heart. Esther at this time must have had a sad heart; and however tastefully she may have been adorned, the sadness of her heart could not be concealed. We may well suppose that this sadness gave attractive sweetness to her countenance. Sad hearts beat and throb beneath costly robes. We pity the beggar in his rags. We are superficial. The outward affects more than the inward. Oftentimes more pity should be evoked by the sight of those clothed in purple and fine linen. Amid the splendours of royalty the wretchedness of humanity is visible. Shakespeare says, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” No monarchs have risen up to refute the libel; yea, many kings have borne witness to its truthfulness. In ancient history we read that the sleep went from king Darius; and many kings since then have tossed in sleepless misery on beds of down, amid drapery of purple and of gold. King David cries, “I am poor and needy;” poor in the midst of an abundance of wealth; needy while thousands are ready to supply his wants.

II. The royalty of faith sustains in sadness. Some make too much of Esther's sadness in the present instance. Sometimes she is represented as fainting. Sad no doubt she was, but her sadness had not a paralyzing effect. Sad no doubt

she might well be, considering the importance of the interests at stake and the desperate nature of her venture ; but her sadness had not a killing effect upon her nervous system, for we may be well assured that her faith sustained her. The sacred record says nothing about her fainting. That faith which led her to exclaim, "If I perish I perish;" which supported through the long fast, which led her to take wise means for the success of her enterprise, which brought her to face the worst—would not fail her now at this the most important point of her undertaking. We seem to see the royalty of her faith eclipsing far the royalty of her apparel. The latter could not prevent her sadness. The former sustained in her sadness, and made it sweetly beautiful. Gloriously charming it is to see a sustaining faith overcoming and smiling through the sadness of a beautiful woman. The royalty of faith is the only power to sustain in sadness. It is a royal power that possesses the true alchemy which can transmute the base metal of sadness into the celestial gold of abiding gladness. Go to the chamber of the sick saint, and ask what inspires with patience, and even with holy pleasure. Go to the cell where virtue is imprisoned, and ask what enables the prisoner to sing songs of rapture, to see sights of beauty, to feed on heavenly manna, to ascend the Delectable Mountains, to feel the light of heaven around, and to catch the freshly-blowing breezes of Paradise. Go to the missionary in far-off lands, exiled from his home, in loneliness pursuing his weary but heavenly mission, standing bereft of wife and of child on account of the unhealthiness of the country where he labours, and ask what sustains under such trying circumstances. Go to the pastor labouring amongst an unresponsive people, his heart well nigh broken by indifference and in some cases by actual cruelty, and ask what stimulates to heroic perseverance. Go to the martyr chained to the stake; see the faggots piled round about him; already the flames lick and scorch his body; but lo! his face is lighted up as if it had been the face of an angel, and now he sings his own funeral hymn, not a sad dirge, but inspiriting strains; and again inquire whence this wonderful triumph. And all with one consent acknowledge the sustaining power of faith. This is the victory that overcometh the world—even our faith.

III. The royalty of faith leads to daring ventures. We can scarcely either understand or appreciate the daring nature of that venture which was made by Esther. The words are to us often only as so many words—these words "And Esther stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house." It would be something to brave and to pass the sentinel, and all the court attendants, and present ourselves before our gracious queen. But this would be as nothing to what Esther did, though she was herself a queen. We understand the heroic power of faith in the conduct of the three Hebrew children. We can admire the splendid moral nobility of Daniel, who, in spite of edicts, in spite of threatened lions, holds on to his purpose of prayer to the God of heaven. But let us try to get a correct view of the greatness of Esther's faith, of the might of her heroism, as she stands "in the inner court of the king's house," waiting for the word that may mean life, but might very possibly mean death. She stands dressed in royal apparel, but that royal apparel for aught she knew might be but the splendid yet ghastly preparation for the doom of destruction. If we celebrate the faith of Abraham who was ready to offer up his only-begotten son, shall we have no need of praise for Esther who was ready to offer up herself? Why Esther's name does not appear among the list of those worthies whose faith is celebrated in the Hebrews we cannot tell? Perhaps if time had not failed the writer he would have used Esther's name as an illustration of the power of faith. Certainly we cannot help feeling that Esther's faith was a Divine inspiration. This, however, we ought surely to learn—that if we make no daring ventures it is because our faith is weak. Faith, like other graces, is increased by exercise. What faith prompts us to do let us at once decide to do. And the more we attempt the more we shall be disposed to attempt.

IV. The royalty of faith is greater than the royalty of mere circumstantialia. Here is a contrast—a suppliant woman standing in a helpless attitude, and in an exposed condition. A mighty monarch sitting upon a royal throne in the royal house whose wish is law, and whose word is either life or death. But the suppliant woman masters the mighty monarch. Mere worldly considerations will not satisfactorily account for the victory. We know the power of women over men. We are not unmindful of the great influence which female beauty has wielded over the hearts of kings, over the counsels of courtiers, and over the destinies of nations. It may be said that the weak monarch was captivated and overcome by the charm of Esther's beauty. But this will not meet our view of the case. We believe that Esther was victorious because she was royal by virtue of her faith in God, Ahasuerus was conquered because he was merely royal in circumstantialia. Faith is a royal power; it sits enthroned above the might of sceptred kings; it is mightier than the mightiest of the earth-born. Kings have killed the children of the faith, but their royalty has not been overcome. The royalty of faith has subdued kings, and conquered nations. Who are the men that rule to-day? The men of faith. These are the true kings, not those the world calls kings. The Cæsars and the Neros do not now rule; death has stripped them of the outward show of royalty. The Pauls and the Peters now rule. They rule in spheres where their authority is not acknowledged. They overcame death. It gave them a larger kingdom. It granted a nobler royalty. The men of faith sit on a throne that death cannot shake. They wield a sceptre which death cannot touch with its icy hand. As time advances, and as men become still wiser, the men of faith will rule in still larger measure. Faith is better and mightier than weapons of war, than words of wisdom, than the gilded trappings of earthly royalty.

V. The royalty of faith commands success. Esther obtained favour in the sight of the king, and he held out to her the golden sceptre. What we may call natural faith is essential to success. The man must have faith in himself who is to succeed. The farmer must have faith in the abiding character of nature's laws if he is to work with perseverance. The seaman must have faith in the safety of his vessel, and in nautical arrangements, if he is to set forth on his voyage with hope. The merchant must have faith in the promises of his fellows if he is to trade with confidence. This natural faith is working all through society. In the moral realm faith is essential; faith is even of more importance. Faith is not the cause of the favour of God, but the means whereby that favour is disclosed to our hearts. The favour of God towards the believer is antecedent to the exercise of faith, but the exercise of that faith it is which reveals to our souls the existence of that favour. Esther's faith and Esther's beauty caused her to obtain that favour in the sight of the king which she appeared to have lost. The faith of the sinner discovers the favour of God which is waiting to manifest its goodness, and to bestow its blessings. Faith is the condition, but not the cause, of salvation. "Thy faith hath saved thee," saith our Lord to the woman who anointed his head with oil, and his feet with ointment, because her faith laid hold of Christ's forgiving love. That readiness to forgive was there prior to the woman's exercise of faith; but this faith was the means of finding out the greatness of that love. Faith brought peace. Faith is the condition of salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith triumphs over moral difficulties, and obtains success with heaven's king.

Finally, **The royalty of faith sways the golden sceptre.** "The king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre." Esther not only touched, not only kissed the top of the sceptre, but swayed the golden sceptre. The golden sceptre was moved by the hand of Ahasuerus; but Esther's faith moved the arm that moved the sceptre. Esther's power was invisible. The unseen is mightier than the seen. Mind triumphs over matter. Moral force conquers brute force. Esther swayed the

golden sceptre of material sovereignty and she also swayed the golden sceptre of moral sovereignty. Thus Esther was queen in two spheres. She was enthroned in both the material and the moral realms. Faith sways a golden sceptre that exerts an influence reaching farther than the sovereignty of Ahasuerus. He ruled over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces. A great kingdom, yet only one kingdom. Faith rules in two kingdoms. It has to do for power in time and for peace in eternity. Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Godlikeness is the product of living faith. This royal character is not possible without the working of a royal faith. It is then a mighty power. It moves the arm that moves the world. It touches the throne of God with wondrous effect. It makes all heaven listen to the prayers of earth. Faith has an arm stronger than that which tore the gates of Gaza from their fastenings, a sound more powerful than that which overthrew the walls of Jericho, a wisdom superior to that which speaks in the Proverbs of King Solomon, and visions more enrapturing than those which passed before the mind of Ezekiel. Faith sways a golden sceptre which can never be wrested from the grasp. It enables its possessor to ride triumphantly over the boiling waves of trouble, and to pass through the fires unhurt. By the aid of this golden sceptre the man is sovereign over death. He can ask in triumph, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." The glorious answer is given: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This golden sceptre knocks at heaven's gate; it flies open, and the redeemed spirit passes among the royalties of the eternal world.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—2.

Of all the virgins presented to Ahasuerus, none was so pleasing as Esther. "Let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashiti." When that decree was published, what strife, what emulations (may we think) was among the Persian damsels that either were, or thought themselves to be, fair! Every one hopes to be a queen; but so incomparable was the beauty of that Jewess, that she is not only taken into the Persian court, as one of the selected virgins, but hath the most honourable place in the seraglio allotted to her. The other virgins pass their probation unregarded; when Esther's turn came, though she brought the same face and demeanour that nature had cast upon her, no eye sees her without admiration. The king is so delighted with her beauty, that, contemplating all the more vulgar forms, his choice is fully fixed upon her. Our heavenly King is pleased with all our graces; hot zeal and cool patience pleaseth him; cheerful thankfulness and weeping penitence pleaseth him; charity in the height and humility in the dust pleaseth him; but none of them are welcome to him with-

out faith, as nothing can please him without Christ. There is none that dares venture into his presence without faith; she is that Esther to which God holds out the golden sceptre. Adorn thy soul with this grace; "so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty."—*Adams*.

The apocryphal author and Josephus say that she took two maids with her, on one of whom she leaned, while the other bore up her train,—that her countenance was cheerful and very amiable, but her heart was in anguish,—that the king, lifting up his countenance that shone with majesty, at first looked very fiercely upon her, whereupon she grew pale, and fainted, and bowed herself on the head of her maid that went by her; but then God changed the spirit of the king, and, in fear, he leaped from his throne, took her in his arms till she came to herself, and comforted her with loving words. Here we are only told, that he protected her from the law, and assured her of safety by holding out to her the golden sceptre, which she thankfully touched the top of, thereby presenting herself to him as a humble petitioner.

Thus having had power with God, and prevailed, like Jacob, she had power with men too. He that will lose his life for God shall save it, or find it in a better life.—*Matthew Henry.*

The unexpectedness of pleasing objects makes them many times the more acceptable; the beautiful countenance, the graceful demeanour, and goodly presence of Esther have no sooner taken the eyes, than they have ravished the heart, of king Ahasuerus; love hath soon banished all dreadfulness. "And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand." Moderate intermission is so far from cooling the affection, that it inflames it. Had Esther been seen every day, perhaps that satiety had abated the height of her welcome; now, three and thirty days' retiredness hath endeared her more to the surfeited eyes of Ahasuerus. Had not the golden sceptre been held out, where had queen Esther been? The Persian kings affected a stern awfulness to their subjects; it was death to solicit them uncalled. How safe, how easy, how happy a thing it is, to have to do with the King of heaven, who is so pleased with our access that he solicits suitors! who, as he is unweariable with our requests, so he is infinite in his beneficences!

Commonly, when we fear most we speed best; God then most of all magnifies his bounty to us when we have most afflicted ourselves. Over-confident expectations are seldom but disappointed, while humble suspicions go laughing away. It was the benefit and safety of but one piece of the kingdom that Esther comes to sue for; and, behold, Ahasuerus offers her the free power of the half; he, that gave Haman, at the first word, the lives of all his Jewish subjects, is ready to give Esther half his kingdom ere she ask. Now she is no less amazed at the loving munificence of Ahasuerus than she was before afraid of his austerity.—*Bishop Hall.*

It is likely that she left her attendants without, lest she should draw them into danger; and contented herself (when she went in to the king) with those faithful companions, Faith, Hope, and Charity, who brought her off also with safety.

And the king sat upon his royal throne. Royal indeed, as Athenæus describeth it. It should be our earnest desire to see the King of Glory upon his throne. Austin wished that he might have seen three things: 1. Romam in flore; 2. Paulum in ore; 3. Christum in corpore. Rome in the flourish, Paul in the pulpit, Christ in the flesh. Venerable Bede cometh after, and correcting this last wish, saith, Imo vero Christum in solio sedentem. Let me see Christ upon his throne royal rather.

And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. He did not kick her out of his presence, as some Cambyses would have done, neither did he command her to the block, as Henry VIII. did his Anne Bullen upon a mere misprision of disloyalty; neither yet did he cashier her, as he had done Vashiti for a less offence; but, by holding out his sceptre shows his gracious respects unto her. This was the Lord's own work, as was likewise that of old, that Laban should leave Jacob with a kiss. Let a man's ways please the Lord, and men shall quickly befriend him.—*Bishop Hall.*

This is truly heroic magnanimity, by which Esther declares as great a faith towards God as love towards his Church. Her trust in him is such that she incurs the peril of her life in obedience to his call. For though all the circumstances of the case threaten her destruction, still she hangs by faith upon the Divine promises. For whom God calls and leads into danger, to him he has also promised preservation and deliverance in those dangers. To Abraham he said, "Get thee out of thy country, and thy father's house." This was a call to face danger. But he also added the promise, "I will make of thee a great nation." It is love alone that exposes itself in behalf of the Church of God, and would rather risk its own life than leave the Church of God in danger.—*Brenz.*

Esther was not one of those who resolve and promise well, but do not perform. How ready are we, like the disobedient son in the parable, to say, We will go and work in the vineyard, and after all go not! But what excuse shall we have for breaking our promises

through the mere power of laziness, when Esther kept her word at the risk of her life? She deserves to be ranked with the noble army of confessors, if not of martyrs. She went in unto the king when a law faced her which declared it to be death for any subject, not excepting the queen, to go in unto the king's private apartments without his leave.

Nor did she linger in doubt whether she should go in unto the king or not. If she had, new temptations, dangerous to her virtue, might have assaulted her. Her resolution had been already formed, and she makes haste, and delays not to do the commandment of Mordecai, which she considers as a commandment from God. On the third day, she went in unto the king. Her fast did not, it seems, consist of three complete days and nights. In the language of the Jews, "three days and three nights" might mean one whole day and part of two others. Jesus is said to have been "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," and yet he is said to have risen "on the third day."

She observed her fast, and it was no sooner over than she went in unto the king. It was wise in her, when she had finished her supplication, to present her petition to the king. When Hannah prayed in the bitterness of her grief, her heart was eased; she was no more sorrowful. We have reason to think that Esther's anxieties, too, were banished by her devotion. She had been lifting up her soul to the Lord. She had been, doubtless, remembering her song in the night, and the wonderful works of former times would inspire her with hope of a happy event to her present enterprise. Thus she was able to approach unto the king with all that composure of mind, and cheerfulness of countenance, which were necessary for the occasion.

She put on her royal apparel when she went in to the king. She cared not for the distinction of her rank, and placed not her delight in the outward adorning of gold, and pearls, and costly array. But it was necessary to lay aside her mourning apparel, and to put on her beautiful garments when she went in to the king. Good wives will endeavour

to please their husbands by a decency in dress, as well as other things that may appear little when they are not considered as means to gain an important end. The married women care, and ought to care, how they may please their husbands; and those women do not act as becometh saints, whose dress, or any part of their behaviour, naturally tends to produce disgust. Esther had a peculiar reason for dressing herself with her beautiful garments when she went into the king's presence. But all women are bound to please their husbands in things lawful and consistent, because the law of Christ binds them to reverence their husbands: and their husbands, if they are not fools, will not desire them to transgress the laws concerning dress, which two apostles have thought it necessary to record for their direction.*

The countenance of Esther at this critical moment was highly interesting to the king, her husband. Grief, anxiety, and pity, painted in her beauteous face, awakened his pity and attracted his love. She found favour in his eyes, and he held out to her the golden sceptre, the sign of grace and pardon, which Esther touched, in thankful acceptance of the offered mercy.

"As a prince," said God to Jacob, "hast thou power with God; and with men also shalt thou prevail." Esther had been weeping and making supplication, like her father Jacob, and had prevailed, and saw the face of the king as if it had been the face of God, and her life was preserved; and, what was still better, she had the happy presage of the preservation of the life of all her people, in that favour which was extended to herself. What wonderful favours from men may fervent supplication to God obtain! "If He be for us, who can be against us?"—*Lawson*.

Delays in matters of importance are to be deeply censured, and the weightier the matter the more censurable is procrastination. Who then can estimate the folly, the egregious folly, of delay in the concerns of a never-ending futurity!—concerns compared with which the weightiest affairs of time are less than

* 2 Tim. ii. 1 Pet. iii.

nothing! The next thing to delay is total neglect—to putting off to another opportunity, putting off altogether, and delays too frequently thus terminate. When a man is somewhat impressed with his danger as a violator of the Divine law, and a rebel against the Majesty of heaven, but seeks a more convenient season to devote himself to the grand work of salvation, he is as yet in the enemy's hand; the chain is not broken; he is in danger of wearing off his good impressions, of falling back to his former inconsiderateness, and of increasing the callousness of his heart. It is not always that hesitating between God and the world ends well—it is not always that they who halt between two opinions are led to say, The Lord, he is the God, and after him we will go. Oh, beware of delay.

Fasting, and prayer, and communion with God therein, are the true strength of the soul. They lift it above temporary danger, and fill it with holy fortitude. They are likewise the parents of spiritual activity and diligence. Esther is not the only character whom we find gathering holy boldness for perilous duties (iv. 16) through earnest supplications. When Jacob was returning from Laban, he prepared to meet his enraged brother, by first imploring the guidance and protection of God. He knew it to be his duty to go forward, and not to return to Mesopotamia, yet he could not go forward but at the peril of his life, and that of his wives and children. He nerved his soul, however, with strength suited to the emergency, by humbling himself before the mercy-seat of his God, and his fathers' God, and imploring his heavenly interference. He prayed and prospered. Jehoshaphat, surrounded by multitudes of Moabites, Ammonites, and others, sought for courage to meet them at the throne of grace. His eyes were upon God, and his heart was not afraid. He prayed and conquered. He prayed, and God made the battle his own, and triumphed gloriously: he sent forth his wrath, which consumed these uncircumcised hosts as stubble. And how did our Divine Master himself obtain that fortitude, which was needful for the

mighty combat which was before him? How did he prepare for the most arduous enterprise that was ever undertaken? In the same way as the pious queen before us. He repaired to the garden of Gethsemane, and poured forth his soul "with strong crying and tears," and being heard in that he feared, he presented an undaunted face to his enemies, and entered on the conflict with holy earnestness and anxiety. "Rise," said he to his sleeping disciples, "let us be going, behold, he is at hand," &c. (Let us meet him: for I have prayed, and my prayers have been heard; I have prayed, and heaven is on my side.) Brethren, we know not what we lose—of what rich blessings we deprive ourselves, by not abounding in prayer. "We will give ourselves continually unto prayer." Abundant prayer brings joy to the heart, and "the joy of the Lord is our strength." What dangers should we deem too great to face, were our souls but thus filled with the presence of the Lord!—what services should we deem too arduous and self-denying! "Wait on the Lord, and He shall strengthen thine heart." "The love of Christ *constraineth* us to live no longer to ourselves, but," &c.

The goodness of God, in this case, to his fasting and praying servants, demands our attention. "And it was so when the king saw Esther the queen, standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand." God, in whose hands are all hearts, on many of which, however, he works to answer his own wise purposes, but not so as to change or sanctify them—God, we say, disposed the king thus courteously to treat the queen. She was not killed (iv. 11), but kindly invited to approach. The God, who made Esau embrace with fraternal affection him, whom a few hours before he designed to murder, to fall on his neck and kiss him,—made this selfish, capricious, and unreasonable monarch behave thus condescendingly to the queen. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he" often "makes his enemies to be at peace with him." "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."

Now, let us take occasion, from this act of Ahasuerus, to consider the conduct of another King—the blessed and only Potentate, to whom be honour and power everlasting. Ahasuerus held out the sceptre to his queen, who had never offended him, nor been unfaithful to him; but Jehovah holds out his sceptre to the unfaithful. How wonderful the language, in Jer. iii. 1, on this point. “They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man’s, shall he return to her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the Lord.” “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice.”—*Hughes*.

“Now it came to pass.” These words call for special notice in a book which strikingly illustrates the providence of God both in regard to nations and individuals. They remind us that there is nothing stationary—that what comes is moving on. Seasons of trial and perplexity would be overwhelming if they had the character of fixedness. It is happily not so. As you have stood gazing on a mountain, bathed in sunlight, you may sometimes have observed a dark shadow creeping along the side of it, as though hastening to accomplish its mission, and quickly gliding away out of sight, leaving the landscape all the more beautiful because of your remembrance of it. So is it with what is painful and sad in providence. Events of this kind have come at intervals, but it was only to pass—not to abide—like the floating of little clouds between us and the sun; and when past, giving to human life, as to nature, a great richness and variety. Biographies are but commentaries on these familiar words. Indeed, men themselves but come to pass. “The workmen die, the work goes on.” While the river is moving on, and we are observing the

things which fringe its banks, and being differently affected by them, we are ourselves sailing on the surface of the waters, and being swiftly borne along to the great ocean of eternity. “Now it came to pass.”

Three days had been spent by Mordecai and the Jews, Esther and her maids, in fasting and prayer; three days which were, in the experience of all of them, like the gathering up of spiritual strength, and the marshalling of spiritual forces to battle. It was not by carnal weapons that they were to contend against the cruel menace of the world, but by faith, and in dependence on the Lord of Hosts.—*McEwan*.

We all expect to see any gift we have bestowed upon another applied to its destined use, and the neglect of the gift is regarded by us as equivalent to a contempt of the donor. Now it was in presents of dress, and ornaments connected with it, that the Easterns displayed and still display their munificence; so that Esther, arrayed in her royal robes, going to cast herself upon the king’s favour, just went to him in the way that would most vividly remind him that she was the creature of his bounty, as she had been the object of his love.

We may take an illustration here from our Lord’s parable of the Wedding Garment. There is something in that parable which at first appears inexplicable. The persons who were brought in to the marriage-supper were those whom the king’s servants had gathered together from the highways; and how, it may be asked, could the man be found fault with who had not on a wedding garment? Here, then, lies the solution of the difficulty. Dresses befitting the occasion were furnished to the guests, according to the custom of the time; and he who had not on the proper dress must have supposed that his own clothing was good enough, and must have rejected the offer of a garment suitable, which was made to him by the keeper of the king’s wardrobe. For this contempt, then, he was righteously charged and condemned. And so in the case before us, Esther would have been subject to displeasure, and righteously punishable according to

the established law, if, when the king had furnished her with the apparel and decorations suited to her exalted station, she had appeared before him, as he sat upon his throne, in attire more homely. But she had too much wisdom, and too strong a sense of what was becoming and proper, to expose herself to challenge on such a ground; and hence her carefulness to come forth in all the splendour of her queenly dress and ornaments.

And now, with life or death depending on every step, and with a timidity that must have made her look more beautiful than ever, she comes within reach of the king's glance. He had not seen her for more than thirty days. The sight of her at that moment, and in that place, was altogether unexpected. Without having time for reflection, or for speaking to Haman, who no doubt was beside him, of this strange disregard of the courtly etiquette, his former love was rekindled in his heart by the sight of the beautiful vision. He smiled, and held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. She felt that she was safe, and so drew near and touched the top of the sceptre.

Thus far the simple words of the history conduct us; and those who were spectators of this strange scene, would see nothing more in it than a most daring adventure on the part of the queen, with a singular exhibition of good will on the king's part. But with the help of what is stated in the preceding chapter, we get a clearer light upon the whole scene, and can understand the real meaning of the words: "Esther obtained favour in the king's sight." The prayer and fasting of the three previous days had not been without fruit. A Divine influence had been put forth to touch the heart of the king; and, without knowing it himself, by that influence he was led—not only to forgive the queen's unwarrantable intrusion into his presence, but also, as we shall see, to grant her any request which she might make. Here, then, there is the dawning of the day of deliverance for the Jews.

Now, let us, before going farther, make some practical application of this part of our subject. 1. In the first place, this

lesson is obviously to be taken from it, that when we are to engage in any special work or enterprise involving difficulty or danger, the most effectual way to gain the object we have in view is to seek help and direction from on high. No man, indeed, whose heart is really imbued with the fear of God, will fail every day to ask direction and a blessing in the conducting of his ordinary affairs. And this is one circumstance which makes a difference between the pursuits of the mere worldling and those of the Christian, although externally they may seem to be engaged in the very same kind of business.

But when there are momentous interests at stake, when things have to be done out of the ordinary course, then, we say, there ought to be a special application made for Divine assistance and guidance. This is not to supersede the use of such means as prudence and experience may dictate for the accomplishment of the end in view. On the contrary, one of the subjects of prayer in such cases is, that the mind may be enlightened and strengthened so as to lead to the selection of the best means. But then, with all this, the committing of the issue to the appointment of God is the right procedure on the part of all who believe in a Divine providence, and look up to the God of providence as their Father in heaven. Esther, although she fasted and prayed, did not neglect the duty of arraying herself suitably to her station, and as the honour of the king required her to do. But we doubt not, that as she put on her ornaments, and as she went with throbbing heart across the court which separated her apartments from those in which the throne stood, her thoughts were more in heaven than on earth. And from her example we learn, that the spirit in which we should conduct our most important affairs is, that of committing our way to God, while we endeavour not to be awaiting in personal activity, and in the employment of such lawful means as seem most likely to promote our purpose.

2. In the second place, we learn from this part of the narrative, that there may be Divine influence at work upon the

heart and will even of those who have no personal regard for religion, by which they are unconsciously rendered instrumental in advancing the interests of God's people and of his cause. As has been already said, we cannot avoid connecting the sacred exercises in which Esther and her friends were engaged, with the turning of the king's heart toward her. And many other examples of the same kind might be selected from the sacred record. There is the memorable one in the case of Cyrus, when he was moved by the Lord to take compassion on the captive Jews, and to permit all of them who chose, to return to their own land and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. There is another in the case of the same Artaxerxes who showed favour to Esther, to which reference is made in the book of Nehemiah. When this patriotic and pious man was troubled on account of the desolations of Jerusalem, he prayed fervently that the heart of the king might be affected so as to lead him to grant assistance for remedying the evils which were felt by the Jews who had gone to repair the waste places of the holy city. And the king was moved accordingly.

It does not follow from those cases, that the putting forth of Divine influence to incline these heathen monarchs to do what was for the good of God's people, implied any gracious operation upon their hearts in the way of delivering them from their deadly errors. All that can be inferred is, that God's creatures, high and low, are as the clay in the hand of the potter. But this conclusion is very manifest, that as the settlement of numberless affairs, in which the interests of God's people are concerned, rests upon the will of individuals who may not be naturally well disposed towards their cause; this is one direction which their prayers may well take, that God would overrule the heart and will of those enemies, so that the truth may prosper. In this way, in answer to believing and persevering prayer, the words of the Lord may still be, as they often have been, verified, that mountains of difficulty are removed: "The crooked things are made straight, and the rough places plain."

3. In the third place, from the verses under review, compared with the previous history, we may draw an illustration of some important principles in the economy of grace. I must, however, remind you here of a distinction which requires to be kept in view in all comments upon the Old Testament history, and in the illustration of Scripture generally—a distinction between truths evidently deducible from the historical narrative, and directly bearing upon subjects of belief and practice, which are applicable to all times and circumstances; and reflections suggested by certain portions of the history, but suggested by them, rather than manifestly designed to be taught by them. There has often been a tendency exhibited by interpreters of Scripture to spiritualize all the events recorded in it. And in many cases, it must be acknowledged, this has been so happily done, as to make us feel as if we were refreshed by water from the flinty rock. Yet we must never overlook the difference between truth directly revealed, and truth suggested merely in the way of illustration. Now, with these remarks, the point which I would have you for a moment look at here, as bearing upon the doctrines of grace, is suggested by the contrast between Esther's first appearance before the king and her appearance now in the manner above described. In the first instance, she sought not the aid of ornament, but appeared in simple attire. And just as she was she gained the king's heart. But now, when she is about to present an important request to him, a request involving life or death to herself and multitudes besides, she goes arrayed in the dress, and ornaments, and jewels, which were the king's gifts to her, that he might recognize his own love-tokens, and be moved to show favour again by the remembrance that he had shown favour before.

You will easily perceive the application we make of all this. The sinner at first casts himself upon the mercy of God in Christ, in all his natural worthlessness, feeling that he has nothing to rely upon for acceptance and favour but sovereign grace. And God, in accepting him, is moved solely by his own mercy; for

many others, who are more highly gifted, and who have many qualities that might seem to give them a preference according to human judgment, are passed by. Our heavenly King has no respect of persons, so far as birth and the external circumstances and condition of men are concerned; but, at the same time, his love is bestowed sovereignly. "He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy." But when his believing people go to him in their difficulties and troubles to implore his aid, then he recognizes in them, amid all their deficiencies, something of his own comeliness which has been put upon

them. They may be labouring under fears and doubts almost as depressing as those by which they were weighed down when they first threw themselves at his feet imploring mercy to pardon. But they stand now in a different relation to him. He has been gracious toward them, and in their distress, although it may be the distress which is the result of conscious backsliding, he perceives his own marks, or, as the Scripture expresses it, "The spots of his own children," upon them, and as his own, he welcomes them, and graciously answers their requests.—*Davidson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 3—5.

A. LARGE OFFER AND SOME OF ITS CONSEQUENCES.

I. A sympathetic inquiry. The king's heart was touched by the aspect of beauty saddened, and he asks, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? What ails thee? What has brought that sadness on to thy lovely countenance? What has given thee that mournful look? Thou art more attractive in thy sadness; but still I would know the cause of thy grief, that I may remove it if possible." The young and the beautiful in sadness are especially touching. Why should the young suffer? Why should the beautiful have the glory of their loveliness eclipsed by sorrow? Why the tears and groans of infant life? Why the merry laughter of youth so soon turned into the wail of mourning? Why, because Haman and others have sinned. The curse of Haman has visited and pained the innocent heart of Esther. Sin is far-reaching. The first sin has reached from creation's dawn to the present hour, and will go on working to creation's final doom. Oh! we do not rightly consider the mischief we do, the pain we may cause, when we sin. By sin pain and injury are caused both to the sinner himself and to those who are seemingly far removed from the sphere of his influence. Esther's sorrow was the consequence of Haman's sin. Esther's sorrow touched the nature of Ahasuerus. Sympathy was evoked, and this sympathy found vent in the gracious inquiry and in the large offer. In the presence of sorrow, silence may be profound sympathy. If the heart is moved to utterance the words should be few and well-chosen. A truly sympathetic nature will suggest the right words, if indeed the nature be not so overcharged with sympathy as to be divested of the power of utterance. The better part of Ahasuerus comes out in this inquiry which he put to Esther, and is an illustration of the saying, There is good in all, while none are all good.

II. A large offer. Some people put the seemingly sympathetic inquiry, and yet do not follow it up with promises of help. Ahasuerus *felt*, which was good. Ahasuerus *promised* to help, which was better. "What is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom." A large offer truly if it be only regarded as a mere proverbial expression. Proverbs have their deep meaning. A proverbial expression used as a promise must intend much on the part of the promiser. (a) A large offer may be made at the prompting of mere feeling, and when the feeling evaporates the promise is forgotten, or not considered binding. However, if the promise be legitimate and capable of fulfilment it ought to be performed, though it was made at the dictate of feeling. Be careful not to let feeling over-ride judgment. The man without feeling is not a properly developed man.

The man all feeling loses the glory of his manhood. (*b*) A large offer may be made without a due consideration of the limiting nature of our circumstances. Ahasuerus might promise the half of his kingdom, but could he have granted it? Esther could not really have herself monopolized the half of that vast kingdom. We forget the limits of our circumstances and of our capacities sometimes in the largeness of our offers. Infinitude is not our attribute. Man is but a creature. There is truth in one view of the statement that man is the creature of circumstances. (*c*) A large offer may be made without a due consideration of the benefit of the promisee. If any one was likely to be benefited by large material possessions that person was Esther. Even she, however, might have suffered had she received what was thus offered. The deceitfulness of riches might have choked the good seed. Earthly love, as a mere sentiment, is sometimes blind both in its promises and in its bestowals. The blind passion of a mother has done much injury to her offspring. Heavenly love is never blind. Judgment and feeling shape the fashion of Divine promises. There are no limitations to the heavenly promiser. What he has promised he is able to perform. Divine promises always purpose; are intended to promote the highest welfare of the promisee. Let us receive Divine promises in all their fulness. Let us judge him who has promised to be both faithful and all-powerful.

III. A small request. For the present Esther simply contented herself with the small request, "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him." (*a*) Our requests should be shaped with a view to the character and ability of the promiser. Esther was wise. She had a woman's sharp wit, and a woman's keen penetrating power. She saw that for the present this was all which she could likely secure from the hand of Ahasuerus. She must wait for the perfecting of the good work already begun in Ahasuerus. God's ability and willingness to give are large. But we too may have to wait. His purpose for us may not be ripe. At first he may give small blessings, the harbinger of yet greater blessings. His best things he gives last. The ruler of the feast said more than he meant, 'Thou hast kept the good wine till now.' Let our askings be in harmony with Divine purposes, so far as we can understand them. (*b*) Our requests should be shaped with a view to our wants and to our circumstances. This was how Esther shaped her request. This was all she wanted for the present, and this was all that her circumstances would now allow her to obtain. We do not always know our true wants. The complexity of our circumstances baffle. Our first prayer is—"Lord, show us what we need; teach what our circumstances require. Adapt thy gifts to our necessities. Arrange thy blessings to meet the exigencies of our circumstances." Definite requests may be prompted by presumption as well as faith.

IV. A speedy fulfilment. Some promises are rashly made. After-consideration may reveal their folly. Yea, after-consideration may show that they are neither lawful nor binding. Herod made a foolish promise to the daughter of Herodias. Had it been his own head that was required, he would at once have seen the folly of his conduct, and refused the request. Neither the oath nor the company would have induced him to yield. When the promise, however, is legitimate it ought to be speedily performed even at the cost of the promiser. It was an easy thing for Ahasuerus to grant Esther her small request. "Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther has said." The weak king was capable of promptness. This is also a good trait in his character. Love induces zeal. Zeal is prompt in its actions. What zeal should possess the lovers of Jesus! And yet what laggards we are in attending the banquets of heaven. Let us make haste to the heavenly banquet. Let us earnestly bid others to the feast.

V. A consequent incongruous assembly. The king's great offer has a seemingly insignificant result. The king and Haman and Esther appeared together at the banquet. So far this is illustrative of human proceedings. Pretentious begin-

wings, small results. Look a little further, and we shall see that this is one of the links in the chain of circumstances leading on to the Divinely-purposed result. Very small are the links in the chain of Divine purposes. Small, but strong as adamant. What an incongruous assembly! The weak and mighty monarch. The wily and wicked Haman. The beautiful and virtuous and strong-souled Esther. The intended victim entertaining the victimizer. The victim will soon become the conqueror. She is now on the high road to victory. The victimizer will soon be caught in his own toils. Thus the banquets of earth bring together very opposite characters, and are fraught with unlooked-for results. There are not only social and intellectual, but moral, differences at earthly banquets. There is a banquet coming where there will be no disunion. In heaven there will doubtless be intellectual differences, but there will be no moral incongruities. The music of heaven is harmonious. Moral natures in heaven will be rightly adjusted. Heart will respond to heart in perfect unison, as harp answers to harp in the hands of angel performers. The wicked Hamans will not be summoned to the great and final feast. Whatsoever defileth shall not pass the pearly gates. Only the redeemed shall there be allowed entrance. Let us seek to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the Divine Spirit, and keep in constant view the abundant entrance to heaven's glorious banquet.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 3—5.

It is not good to swallow favours too greedily, lest they either choke us in the passage, or prove hard of digestion. The wise queen, however she might seem to have a fair opportunity offered to her suit, finds it not good to apprehend it too suddenly, as desiring, by this small dilation, to prepare the ear and heart of the king for so important a request.—*Bishop Hall.*

And what is thy request?—q. d. "Fear not to utter it; I am very earnest to know it, and fully resolved to grant it." It was more troublesome to Severus the emperor to be asked nothing than to give much. When any of his courtiers had not made bold with him, he would call them and say, "What meanest thou to ask me nothing?" "Hitherto ye have asked me nothing (saith the King of Saints to his beloved Esther); ask, that your joy may be full." He is worthily miserable that will not make himself happy by asking.

It shall be given thee, to the half of the kingdom.—A proverbial rather than a prodigal speech, and much in this king's mouth. If some ambitious Semiramis had had such an offer, what ill use might she soon have made of it! The dancing damsel made no good use of the like from Herod. But a bee can suck honey out of a flower, that a fly can-

not skill to do. Esther prudently and modestly improveth the immoderate offer of the king, and conceiveth good hope. How much more may we (upon those exceeding great and precious promises given us by God), of an exuberancy of love, and a confluence of all comforts for this life and a better; especially since God doth not pay his promises with words, as Sertorius is said to have done; neither is he off and on with his people, but performeth all with the better; as Naaman pressed the prophet's man to take two talents when he asked but one. The widow of Sarepta had more than she could tell what to do with; her cruse never ceased running till she had no room. The Shunammite would ask nothing of the prophet, nor make use of his offered courtesy. He sends for her again, and makes her a free promise of that which she most wanted and desired—a son. God's kindness is beyond all this. He giveth his servants what they forget or presume not to ask; and sends his Spirit to help them, and to form their prayers for them, and thereby to seal them up to the day of redemption, to assure them of the kingdom.

If it were policy in Esther to invite Haman whom she hated, was it likewise piety? did she not dissemble? R. Solo-

mon saith, she invited Haman alone with the king, that other courtiers might envy him, and so undermine him. But that is but a sorry excuse, neither doth Syra's allegation of her good intentions mend the matter. They answer better who say, that she invited him that she might accuse him to his face; and so cut off all matter of his excuse or escape. Hereby also she would show, saith Lavater, that she accused him, not out of wrath or revenge; but that she was drawn to it, and, as it were, driven by mere necessity.—*Trapp*.

To promise much is the universal custom of great men, but those keeping promises are few in number. It is far easier to obtain favours by an humble and modest behaviour than by sullenness and a boasting manner.—*Starke*.

Those two great monarchs made great grants and largesses, the one to Esther, the other to Herodias's daughter; but yet they were limited only to the half of their kingdoms; and the royal power in their kingdoms they meant still to retain and reserve wholly to themselves. But God, having placed Christ on his throne, bids him ask men to the whole of his kingdom, for God hath made him a king, sitting on his throne with him, not to share his, but to have all power in heaven and earth.—*Goodwin*.

Oh the wonderful love of Christ! the wonderful bounty of his love! It was a royal offer of Ahasuerus to Esther, and a sign of great love! "What is thy request? it shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom." Ay; but Christ not only offers, but gives, not half, but whole, kingdoms; yea, whole worlds. But you will say, This is but a chimera, an empty notion; for we see there are none enjoy less of the world than those whom you say Christ loves. I answer, The world is not able to judge of true enjoyments. There are none that have a more real, and advantageous, and a less troublesome and dangerous enjoyment of the world than saints. And I prove it thus. We may be most truly said to enjoy that which we reap the greatest emolument from, and get the greatest benefit by, that can be imagined; but there are none that improve the

world to such a real advantage as the saints; for the love of Christ has so ordered the world, and everything in it, as it tends to their happiness. And what greater benefit imaginable than happiness?—*Clarkson*.

In the country Carniensis of Spain, there is a river that shows all the fish in it to be like gold; but take them into your hand, they appear in their natural kind and colour. Such are promises and specious pretences of love in his mouth that would obtain his purpose; bring them to the touch, and thou shalt find all is not gold that glitters. Great boast and small roast will never fill the belly; he therefore that will engage himself into any great action, upon promise of great assistance, if he be not as sure of his friend's ability in power as readiness in will, he reckons without his host, and sits down with the loss.—*Spencer*.

But let us now make a brief improvement of the verses which have been considered. And here the train of thought suggested to us will have already occurred to the minds of some. It embraces two particulars: the largeness of the king's offer, and Esther's hesitancy at once to avail herself of it.

1. With respect to the largeness of the offer. "Even to the half of my kingdom," the king said, "will thy request be granted." This, we have remarked, was the language of exaggeration. But we have it declared, in the words of truth addressed by our heavenly Lord to his people: "Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Here there is no limitation, but whatever is needed to the completion of our true spiritual joy we are invited to ask in the name of Christ; and if we ask in faith, as we are elsewhere told, it will be given, "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "All things are yours," it is said to believers; and it may well be said, since Jehovah gives himself to them as their God, and Christ is theirs, and the Spirit dwells in them.

2. But then, secondly, as Esther was afraid all at once to ask what she most desired, so God's people are often slow or afraid to avail themselves to the full of their privilege of asking. Many are contented to live from year to year, with little more to uphold them than an indistinct hope that they shall reach heaven at last, when, if they would but take home God's promises in all their freeness and richness, they might be able to rejoice in him as their portion. Many even seem to think that it would be presumptuous in them to expect such comfort and enlargement of heart as they read that others have enjoyed; whereas the Scripture tells them that the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, and that they are only straitened in themselves.

But perhaps it may be, that as Esther did not feel herself in a condition all at once to close with the king's most liberal offer, so some among us, for other reasons than the feeling that it would be presumptuous, may be exercised in the same way with respect to spiritual privileges. This point deserves a moment's notice. There are some professed followers of Christ who are not altogether prepared either to ask or to receive the full measure of privilege which he offers to his people. They have still some lingering desires after the world and its pleasures which they are unwilling all at once to renounce; and though they seem to have cast in their lot with the redeemed, they would rather have the process of self-renunciation and of sanctification to be gradual than summary. In a word, with their present feelings, they would be, I must say, unwilling, or at least afraid, to receive the large communications of grace which Christ has promised to bestow. Now this is a most dangerous state of mind, and cannot be otherwise designated than as a grieving of the Spirit of God. And if there be any here to whom the above remarks are applicable, I would beseech them no longer to sport with offered blessings—no longer to imagine that they can serve Christ and the world together. Esther only deterred craving all she wished,

because that was the best way to obtain it in the end. But if you are unwilling to take all that you might have, because in that case you must bid adieu to certain pleasures which you desire to retain, then you provoke the Lord to withdraw from you altogether the sense of his favour, and to leave you in utter darkness.—*Davidson*.

"What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom."—What encouragement is here presented to those who are called to venture their lives, or their reputation, or their substance, in the cause of God! They shall not only have these preserved, but in one way or another increased. How often has God prevented the fears, and outdone the hopes, of his servants! It is the cowardice of Christians that spoils their fortune. Their fears kill them, and benumb, and palsy, and deaden their exertions for God and his Church. If we had more faith, and "added to our faith fortitude," our trials would be less, and our success greater. "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"*

From the story of the unjust judge our Saviour took occasion to teach that "men ought always to pray and not to faint;" and, without wandering from the subject, I may surely take opportunity from this portion of history to inculcate the same duty. Did this haughty monarch hold out the sceptre, and say, What wilt thou, and what is thy request? and shall not God hear his own elect—his chosen spouse, crying to him day and night? Esther had to go into the presence of a proud imperious man, we to go into the presence of a God of love and condescension. She was not called; we are invited. She went in against the law; we have both precept and promise in our favour—yea, precept upon precept, and promise upon promise. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." She had no friend at court on whom she could rely, and

* John xi, 40.

the great favourite was the accuser of her brethren, the mortal foe of her name and race; we, even when we have sinned, and sinned after light and pardon, have an advocate with the Father, his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased, who also is the propitiation for our sins. Esther was encouraged to ask to the extent of the half of the kingdom of Persia; we are encouraged to ask to the whole of the kingdom of heaven, with a life-rent on earth of all that is needful for us. Ought we not then to "come boldly to the throne of grace"? —*McCrle*.

She would act with calmness and deliberation, as one who waited and relied upon the leading of providence. The king broke the silence by encouraging her to speak, and promising to grant her petition whatever it was, even "to the half of the kingdom." There seems to be more implied in this promise than the loose language of exaggeration. It has been usual to interpret it in this way, but inquiry into the custom of ancient Persian kings presents it in a different aspect. It was customary for them, we are informed, to bestow grants or pensions to their favourites, "not by payments from the treasury, but by charges upon the revenues of particular provinces or cities." One province or city was charged with providing the particular favourite's clothes, another his meat, another his wine, another his jewellery, and so on, thereby enabling the person to live in great luxury and magnificence. Because of this charge laid upon special districts, they were called by the article which they had to supply, such as "The queen's girdle," "The queen's head-dress," et cætera. And if we take into account this old custom, it is probable that the promise of the king to Esther amounted to this, that he would even lay the half of his kingdom under some burden or tribute for her special benefit. Perhaps this also was an exaggeration, but it gives to the words a significance which we should not otherwise have understood. "Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be

even given thee to the half of the kingdom."

Without branching out upon far-fetched analogies, and remotely suggested themes, we would, for the sake of the comfort which it may afford, refer to ourselves as suppliants in the presence of our King. The Church is "the Lamb's wife." She has free access to the throne of the King of kings. O how timidly and doubtfully do believers sometimes draw near to him! It is as though they feared his royal sceptre, forgetting that it is the sceptre of mercy; as though they were apprehensive that he had taken away his love from them, forgetting that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loves them unto the end." He has no half-measures—no half-kingdoms to offer. He promises you the kingdom—wholly, willing, unreservedly,—and even chides you for having "hitherto asked nothing in his name," and encourages you to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." King Abasuerus could not anticipate the request of Esther; after his own carnal heart he thought that it must be some additional temporal good. But our King knows all beforehand, and has provided for, and is ready to bestow upon, us all that we can need upon the earth, and all that we can desire to prepare us for heaven. And surely, if we require to be stirred to earnestness and importunity by the presence of a great cause, we all have it in the condition of our own hearts, the souls of others, and the salvation of the world. There are spiritual as well as natural laws, according to which God works—a law which requires that the husbandman should sow the seed if he would reap a harvest, and a law which requires that we should pray if we would obtain the blessing. By our own large spiritual necessities and the wants of the world around, as well as by the unstinted generosity and beneficence of our King, are we urged on all hands to abound more in prayer—"Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us; God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."—*McEwan*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 6—8.

DIRECTIONS FOR PRAYER.

If in the book of Esther only this one passage were found we ought to feel that the book had not been written and preserved in vain; for it is a passage that has served good purpose in the way of illustrating and enforcing theological lessons. It is one of the passages that readily presents itself to the mind of those who wish to speak about prayer. In other passages it might appear as if the moral lessons were brought to the text instead of being naturally and logically deduced; but in this passage the mind at once seizes upon the subject, and reads from it a lesson or prayer. Following the plan of textual division and exposition we find here laid down ample directions for prayer.

I. There must be method in prayer. What is thy petition, and what is thy request? These are questions which the praying soul may well put to itself as it is about to approach the throne of grace. Self-examination is good, and it is especially beneficial as we are about to approach our God. Too many in these busy times simply content themselves with the idea that prayer is to be offered. Prayer with them is too much like the hurried salute given to a passing friend. Prayer with them is like the quick march of an army past the royal standard. It is a kind of offering presented in order to propitiate Deity. It is only counting beads strung on a cord. It is only as one turning a praying wheel. God does not require such offerings. He inquires, What is thy petition? And we too should ask ourselves the same question. Self-examination and meditation before prayer will give speed to our prayers, and enable us to derive benefit from the same. We go as beggars; let us understand what we want, and shape our requests accordingly. We go as children; let us try to perceive that we need light, and love, and guidance, and earnestly appeal to God for the required blessings. If at the close of closet prayer an angel were to appear and to ask, What is thy petition? how startled we should be, and we should have to answer. I was not thinking very much about it, only I felt that I should be uneasy if a few words were not said before I retired to rest. If God's angels were to stand some Sunday morning beside the thirty or forty thousand pulpits of our land, and say aloud to every minister, What is thy petition?—the ministers and the congregations would be surprised out of their inane proprieties. And if those angels had the power of making the true thoughts speak out, still greater would be the surprise. The Church minister might say, I had no request, I only thought of reading the prayers, and I did not even think much of the words written in the Prayer-book. In fact I was not conscious of being in a devotional spirit. The dissenting ministers would have varying answers. Some were earnestly pleading with God for a blessing, as some devout Church ministers do pray by means of written and read prayers. But what of others? Some might say, I was trying to be philosophical; some, rhetorical; some, beautifully simple; some, I was trying to reach my ideal of what prayer should be; and other some, a few it is hoped, I was imitating this one or that one noted for the beauty of his prayers. Surely modern Christianity would be a greater power in the earth if all, or a vast majority, were able to give a definite answer to the question, What is thy petition? God pity our weakness. He does pity; he bears long; he remembers those who do pray, a larger number than perhaps we sometimes think. Oh for more strength in prayer!—and this is gained by more method. God graciously asks, What is thy petition?—shall we not responsively inquire, What am I going to do? What blessings do I require? What is the urgent requisite for the assembly for whom I pray?

II. There must be assurance in prayer. Not merely the assurance that God is ready to hear prayer, but the assurance that we "have found favour in the sight of the King." Esther desired to feel her ground sure on this important point. How

shall we know that the King of heaven is favourable? We may know by looking to the unspeakable gift. "God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly." May the Holy Spirit teach each one to know and to feel Christ died for *me* a sinner! We need not doubt the favour of God if we rest fully upon the Son of his love. In Christ we may know that it will please the heavenly King to grant our petition. "He that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Here is a large charter of blessings. God's great gift of Jesus implies the gift of all things needful. It includes and surpasses every other charter of blessings. We cannot stand anywhere out of the reach of God's blessed "all things." The atmosphere seems to be an all-pervading force; but God's "all things" go even further, and are more enduring than that life-giving atmosphere. Riches may take to themselves wings and fly away; a fair reputation may be blighted; health may decline; friends may depart; relatives may become indifferent; even father and mother may forsake; death itself may come as if to complete the awful ruin; but still God's "all things" abide to the Christian amid every change, and in the midst of every disaster. Assurance in prayer, why should we ever doubt? Let boasting scientists talk; we are not careful, even if we were able, to answer them in this matter. We betake ourselves to prayer, and forget the babbling noise of opposing tongues. God's "all things" are vaster than the scientist's few things imperfectly understood. God's "all things" are deeper and higher, longer and broader, than philosophies falsely so-called.

III. There may be hesitancy in prayer. Not the hesitancy of doubt, but of deliberation. Preachers are sometimes exhorted to cultivate the pause in their sermons. All may with great advantage be exhorted to cultivate the pause in their prayers. The silent waiting of the Society of Friends is not without its instructive teaching to those who have too much fluency in prayer. Esther answered and said, "My petition and my request is;" then she stopped as if to think. The sentence is not properly punctuated if we look into Esther's mind. A full stop would be appropriate. There was doubtless a full stop in Esther's mind. "My petition and my request is." Oh, is there not prayer, the truest prayer, when the heart is too full for utterance? Unspoken prayers make more noise in heaven than "the greatest prayers" ever addressed to applauding audiences. "Now, let us have a few minutes' silent prayer," says the revivalist, at the close of an exciting address; and perhaps most of the people are not in a state for prayer. Many do not know what to pray for. Well, the silence will be beneficial after so much bluster. It can do no harm. The silence we desire is not that which is produced at the command of another. There must be the deep true silence of the soul. "Commune with your own heart, and be still."

IV. There must be submission to the Divine will in prayer. "I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." Here Esther answers the king, but she also answers the workings of her own devout mind. She is watching the leadings of providence; she is waiting for the finger of God to point the way in which she is to walk; she is intently listening for the Divine voice to speak to her in the silence of her prayerful waiting; she is in no hurry. To-morrow will do, if to-day the purpose is not ripe. To-morrow will do, if it is in God's hands. She will not limit the Divine to-morrow. Certainly we must not. Human to-morrows are easily measured. Divine to-morrows out-pass the petty measurements of time. The praying soul may desire the blessing to-day, but God may say to-morrow is best. Delay is part of the Divine plan in dealing with his people and his Church. The to-morrow sometimes seems a long way off, and a long time in coming. Let patience have its perfect work. The Divine silence will be broken. God is moving though we see him not, and though we hear not the tread of his feet. There are times in the Church's history when God seems to answer not a word, but ere long the Divine goings are heard. Let faith, patience, and prayer be continued till the Divine silence is broken. God sometimes in answering not a word to a prayer gives the best answer. He answers

not to the mere words but to the true purpose, and the lasting good, of him who sincerely prays. Silence, then, is not denial, but encouragement. May the good Lord increase our faith, strengthen our patience, enlarge our spirit of prayer, and crown all with Divine benedictions.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 6—8.

To make prayer of any value, there must be definite objects for which to plead. We often ramble in our prayers after this, that, and the other, and we get nothing, because in each we do not really desire anything. We chatter about many subjects, but the soul does not concentrate itself upon any object. Do you not sometimes fall on your knees without thinking beforehand what you mean to ask God for? You do, as a matter of habit, without any motion of your heart. You are like a man who would go to a shop and not know what articles he would procure. He may, perhaps, make a happy purchase when he is there, but certainly it is not a wise plan to adopt. And so the Christian in prayer may afterwards attain to a real desire, and get his end; but how much better would he speed if, having prepared his soul by consideration and self-examination, he came to God for an object at which he was about to arrive, with a real request. Did we ask an audience at her Majesty's court, we should not be expected to go into the presence of royalty, and then to think of some petition after we came there. Even so with the child of God. He would be able to answer the great question: "What is thy petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be done unto thee?" Imagine an archer shooting with his bow, and not knowing where the mark is! Would he be likely to have success? Conceive a ship, on a voyage of discovery, putting to sea without the captain having any idea of what he was looking for! Would you expect that he would come back heavily laden either with the discoveries of science or with treasures of gold? In everything else you have a plan. You do not go to work without knowing that there is something that you designed to make; how is it that you go to God without knowing what blessing you design to have?—*Spurgeon*.

And I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.—She had learned to prefer opportunity before time. There might be some by at this first banquet whose company she liked not; or she might not yet have so clear an answer in her own heart to her former prayers, and therefore desireth some further time that night to seek God; whatever the reason of her putting it off till next day was, God's holy hand was in it, that Mordecai might be first so greatly honoured, and Haman's high gallows prepared: *Illum utique magis securum, Regem autem magis benevolum magisque fecit attentum, saith Rupertus*. Hereby she made Haman more secure, and the king more kind and attent.—*Trapp*.

We may recognize the picture of a soul praying to God in the image of Esther standing with humble and imploring attitude before Ahasuerus. Sacred poetry, especially, has made use of single features or expressions of this history in this regard. So Dressler in his beautiful hymn, "My Jesus, to whom seraphim," &c., causes the pious suppliant to say:

"Reach thy sceptre to my soul,
Which like an Esther bows to thee,
And shows herself thy bride to thee."

"Speak: 'Yea, thou art she whom I have chosen.'" The representative significance of the persons in this history have, as it were, brought with them their own recognition. The Christian may certainly employ them in this sense. So Starke, when he says: "If a heathen king can willingly grant such grace, how much more willing is the most faithful Lord to receive all poor destitute sinners coming to him in faith, and in the good time to come to place them upon his throne!" Ahasuerus paid no regard to the fact that Esther had violated his commandment, but received her very graciously, although his irrevocable edict stood in the way of granting her petition.

The father heart of God, although we violate all his laws, and though his unchangeable holiness be against the sinner, still yearns towards us in its great love and grace. But just as Esther came boldly and yet modestly, so we also must combine with true humility a true and elevated courage, a disheartened repentance together with confiding faith. —*Lange.*

He that would be little in temptation, let him be much in prayer. Praying only for carnal things shows a carnal heart, and leaves it carnal. Prayer is a key in the hand of faith to unlock God's treasures. A family without prayer is like a house without a roof—exposed to every wind that blows, and every storm that rages. Prayer will compel a man to leave off sinning, or sinning will make him leave off praying. The greatest and hardest preparation for heaven is within; but the spirit of prayer can effect this. Do you profess to love any one for whom you have never prayed? Rhetoric cannot pray, with all his words; but Faith can pray, even when she has no words. In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart. Pray, not only in the name of Christ, but in the faith of Christ. The gift of prayer may have praise from men, but the grace of prayer has power with God. —*American Churchman's Almanac.*

Let us need present help, and you shall see that he is "a very present help in time of trouble." Let the disciple be sinking amid the waves of Galilee, crying, "I perish"—let the prophet be on his knees in the depths of the sea and the dark belly of the whale—let the widow's last mite, and the barrel's last handful, have come—let the confessor be descending into the lions' roaring den—let the queen have her brave hand upon the door, with these words of high resolve upon her lips, "If I perish, I perish"—let the trembling host have the waters of the Red Sea roaring in their front, and the chariots of Egypt pressing on their rear—let God's people have reached such a crisis; let them stand in any such predicament;—and his answer anticipates their prayer. The supply is on the road before the want is

expressed; the door opens before the hand has struck it; while prayer is travelling up the one line, the answer is speeding down the other. Hear the voice of the Lord: "It shall come to pass; before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Child of God! pray on. God's people are more dear to him than our children can be to us. He regards them with more complacency than all the shining orbs of that starry firmament. They were bought at a price higher than would purchase the dead matter of ten thousand worlds. He cares more for his humblest, weakest child than for all the crowned heads of earth, and takes a deeper interest in the daily fortunes of a pious cottage than in the fall and rise of kingdoms. Child of God! pray on. By prayer thy hand can touch the stars, thy arm stretch up to heaven. Nor let thy holy boldness be dashed by the thought that prayer has no power to bend these skies, and bring down thy God. When I pull on the rope which fastens my frail and little boat to a distant and mighty ship, if my strength cannot draw its vast bulk to me, I draw myself to it—to ride in safety under the protection of its guns; to enjoy in want the fulness of its stores. And it equally serves my purpose, and supplies my needs, that prayer, although it were powerless to move God to me, moves me to God. If he does not descend to earth, I—as it were—ascend to heaven. Child of God! pray on. Were it indispensable for thy safety that God should rend these heavens, it should be done—a wondering world should see it done. I dare believe that; and "I am not mad, most noble Festus." Have not these heavens been already rent? Eighteen hundred years ago, robed in humanity, God himself came down. These blue skies, where larks sing and eagles sail, were cleft with the wings and filled with the songs of his angel train. Among the ancient orbs of that very firmament, a stranger star appeared, travelling the heavens, and blazing on the banner borne before the King, as he descended on this dark and distant world. On Canaan's dewy ground—the lowly bed he had left—the eye of morning shone

on the shape and form of the Son of God; and dusty roads, and winter snows, and desert sands, and the shores and very waves of Galilee, were impressed with the footprints of the Creator. By this manger, where the babe lies cradled; beside this cross, upon whose ignominious arms the glory of the universe is hung; by this silent sepulchre, where wrapped in bloody shroud, the body is stretched out on its bed of spices, while Roman sentinels walk their moonlit round, and death—a bound captive—sits within, so soon as the sleeper wakes, to be disarmed, uncrowned, and in himself have death put to death—faith can believe all that God has revealed, and hope for all that God has promised. She reads on that manger, on that cross, deeply lettered on that rocky sepulchre, these glorious words: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" And there lifting an eagle eye to heaven, she rises to the boldest flights, and soars aloft on the broad wings of prayer:

"Faith, bold faith, the promise sees,
And trusts to that alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And says it shall be done."—*Dr. Guthrie.*

Prayer may be supplication, or thanksgiving, or confession. Or it may be simple intercourse. He that muses toward God prays. If you can conceive of a child in the presence of a parent most beloved that speaks, that is silent, that speaks again, that is again silent; now thought, now fancy, now feeling, in turn, as it were, wheeling the orb of its little mind round completely, so that on every side it receives light or gives light to the parent—the intercourse of that child with the parent is the fittest symbol of true prayer.

Prayer is the soul of a man moving in the presence of God, for the purpose of communicating its joy, or sorrow, or fear, or hope, or any other conscious experience that it may have, to the bosom of a parent.—*Becher.*

It is right not to put off till to-morrow the duty of to-day, but it may be wise to defer to-day what can be done better and more hopefully to-morrow. The

greenness of to-day may be ripeness to-morrow—the blossom of to-day may be fruit to-morrow,—and it is the policy of wisdom to know when to wait and when to act, not waiting too long nor acting too hastily; only to, but no farther than, the ripeness and the fruiting—"I will do to-morrow as the king hath said."

To-morrow! As little could Esther as Haman have divined what was to happen before to-morrow. By faith the Christian leaves to-morrow in the hand of God; but, confident in proud self, the worldly man doubts not but that to-morrow will be as this day, and yet more abundant. There are shadows which are thrown forward, losses and bereavements which make the whole of life more sombre and sad than it had been before; but if each to-morrow was to be known beforehand there would be shadows thrown backward as well as forward, darkening our joys and intensifying our sorrows. As the past has scarcely proved what we could have anticipated, so cannot we now antedate the future. It is well that it should be so—well if, like Esther, we are exercising faith in God, and well too if, like Haman, we are drawing near his signal judgment. Let us advance upon each to-morrow as though to-morrow may be our last, and our last to-morrow will not take us by surprise. "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get again. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow."

"Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart." Be not so cruel as speak to him of to-morrow! Let the wicked enjoy their bright to-day—it is the only bright to-day which they will ever have. It was different with Lazarus than with the rich man in the parable. To the one the last to-morrow was a day of comfort, but to the other a day of dread decision and despair. And ah! how different the to-morrow of Mordecai and his inveterate enemy Haman. The sun is about to rise on the one, just as it is setting on the other. Without farther anticipating that to-morrow, we know not whether to congratulate the

pious Jew the most, or to pity and commiserate the haughty Agagite. They meet to-day, and they shall meet again to-morrow. Yes, to-morrow! Let worldly men fear and prepare for their

last to-morrow! "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."—*McEwan*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 9, 10.

THE SUPERFICIAL MAN.

We can readily picture Haman going forth from the royal banquet with glad heart, with elated step, and haughty mien. Not more proudly did Nebuchadnezzar walk in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and gaze upon the mighty city with feelings of self-laudation, than did the wicked Haman go forth from the palace that was in Shushan, and congratulate himself on his success. And not more certainly did pride have a dreadful fall in the case of Nebuchadnezzar than it was destined to have in the case of Haman. Now he is glad, but soon his gladness is turned into the wailing of discontent. Now he is proud, but soon he will be humbled.

I. Haman's gladness. "Then went Haman forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart." Haman's gladness arose from a false estimation of himself. He vainly fancied that the banquet was in his honour. He regarded all the costly and painful preparation as a fitting homage to his own self-importance. These kinds of false estimates are not peculiar to the Hamans. The poet may exhort, but the poet does not give the power, to see ourselves as others see us. Perhaps after all the power would not be so beneficial. Many a man would be less useful if he saw himself through other people's spectacles. Still exaggerated views of self are harmful. A true estimate of self, with firm dependence upon God, and an earnest desire to do our duty, will furnish the most lasting satisfaction. Haman's gladness arose from a false estimate of his position. We are sometimes never less safe than when we feel most secure. It is not to be supposed that a doubt crossed Haman's mind as he passed away from the royal presence. He did not perceive the dark shadow dogging his steps. Many are glad instead of being sorry because they take false estimates of their position. They build on the sand, and not on the rock. Happy the man who builds on the rock Christ Jesus! Here is abiding gladness. Here is heavenly calm. Here is enduring safety. Thus Haman's gladness was superficial, and consequently transitory. The rapturous gladness of earth is superficial and transitory. The chastened gladness of the soul resting upon Christ is profound and abiding.

II. Haman's use of his eyes. He saw, but he did not see deeply; he did not see correctly. Pride had cast a film over his mental vision. He saw only Mordecai's stubbornness. He did not see that the stubbornness rightly read meant integrity of purpose. He did not see glorious heroism in that unbending form. Prejudice lessens the power of vision. Green-eyed jealousy cannot possibly see correctly. A vast deal of suffering would be saved if eyes were used in a right manner. Men see and yet do not see. Seldom do men see one another justly. We either see too much or see too little. Most see through other people's spectacles. We see virtue and genius in the man who has a reputation. We see a repellent sight in the Jew who sits unbendingly at the king's gate. Let eyes be allowed to do their own proper work.

III. Haman's consequent change of state. The eyes affect the heart. Haman saw, and Haman became full of indignation. Had Haman seen correctly he would have been full of admiration. A false use of the eyes has its penalties. No God-given power or faculty, whether physical, intellectual, or moral, can be perverted

or misused without bringing retribution. There is an indignation which is righteous, and there is an indignation which is unrighteous. When we see tyranny, oppression, and vice flaunting itself in high places, then we do well to be full of indignation. But when we see integrity in low places; when we see a man determined to be honest though it may mean poverty; a man who resolves not to cringe to wickedness, and not to fawn upon and to flatter even royal sinners, then we do badly to be full of indignation. There is so much false propriety in the present day that we are not allowed to be indignant. Zeal is rude. Zeal must never violate the proprieties of polite life. A man's indignant feelings must never get the better of his self-control. If a man can be zealous and not run counter to æsthetic rules, and not hinder his success, well and good. But woe to the man who lets zeal get the better of discretion!

IV. Haman's power of self-control. "Nevertheless, Haman refrained himself." Haman had evidently some of that power which would have fitted him to take his place in modern polite society. He could keep his feelings in subjection when it served his purpose. Perhaps if Mordecai had met him at the banquet Haman could have carried on a conversation with the man whom he thoroughly hated. Too many set Haman before them as an example. They refrain themselves. Words smoother than butter are on their tongues; war is in their hearts. With the mouth they kiss; the concealed dagger is in the hand. Hail, master! is the voice of the betrayer, but the meaning of that voice is too often only known to the Divine. The power of self-control for the time being, however, is not to be despised. But the power of perfect self-conquest is a noble achievement. Haman should not only have refrained himself, but subdued himself. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

V. Haman's resource in trouble. He went home, and consulted his friends and his wife. Happy the man who can feel that his home is a place of refuge; who can go there and forget his sorrows. This is wonderful, that thoroughly bad men have attached to themselves wives who have stuck to them in all calamities. However, Haman's home was not a safe place, for his wife was evidently a bad woman. Only a good true wife can make a good home; a safe place when troubles come. Haman's resource in trouble should not be ours, or at least not our only one. A wife may be wicked; if not wicked she may be weak. The best wife may lead us wrong. Jesus Christ has love dearer than that of fondest wives. Earthly friends may be false, or if not false, unwise. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. There is a friend who knows how to help in, and deliver from, trouble. Let prayer to the great High Priest be our resource in trouble. And then when we pass away from the homes of earth we shall go to the home of the blest, where Mordecais cannot trouble.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 9, 10.

And with a glad heart.—But he rejoiced as many more do in a thing of nought. And the end of this his mirth was heaviness. It was risus sardonius, like that of those, who being stung with the tarantula (a viper in Italy), die laughing and capering. Or as the dolphin, that sporteth most before a storm. Or as the little fishes, that swimming merrily down the silver stream of Jordan, fall shortly after into the Dead Sea. Haman doubtless held himself

now the happiest man alive; as having the royalty, not of the king's ear only but of the queen's too, as he foolishly fancied. This wicked one boasted of his heart's desire, and as for all his enemies, he pulled at them. He said in his heart—I shall not be moved, I shall never be in adversity. Herodotus saith of Apries, king of Egypt, that he conceited and bragged that his kingdom was better settled to him than that any, either God or man,

could remove him; yet was he afterwards taken and hanged by his own subjects. Ælian tells us, that Dionysius, the tyrant, thought it impossible that he should have been cast out of Italy, but it proved otherwise. How suddenly were Alexander, the great conqueror, and Julius Cesar, the perpetual dictator, cut off, and quenched as the fire of thorns. Sic transit gloria mundi. The world's greatest dealings are in no better condition than the bull that goes to be sacrificed with garlands on his head, and music before him, but suddenly feels the stroke of the murdering axe.—*Trapp.*

Then went Haman forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart.—This is true to human nature, to common fact. A man's heart may be black as hell with lying, treachery, and murder, yet there are times when he is joyful; moments when everything goes according to his wish; even when, as now, unsought smiles are shed on him. The future is hidden in the blaze of present light; vengeance, treading close behind, is "shod with wool" and unheard. It is a ghastly fact, profitable to be observed, when it comes in our way. "That day!" Before the next, Haman will be hanged high on his own gibbet. Haman's gladness did not last him home, for Mordecai, his sackcloth laid aside, was again at his post. He had fasted to good purpose, having regained quietness of mind.

Haman strutted forth in all his magnificence, drinking with greedy eyes the obsequious homage of the menials; but in a moment a black scowl of rage eclipsed the simper of gratified vanity. How small this great man was! It would appear that he had expected Mordecai to bow at last. But there Mordecai sat unmoved, not pointing the finger at Haman, not calling him traitor or murderer, but not standing up or moving—a spectacle to men and angels. Possibly he was pondering these words of Zophar: "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short?"—*A. M. Symington, B. A.*

God restrains men's lusts, either by

wisdom, as is said of Haman, that he restrained himself. Yea, many times one lust restrains another. "He restrains himself" (speaking of a covetous man), "and bereaves his soul of good." One lust eats up another; yea, sometimes and often God doth restrain by the immediate work of his own Spirit, by the gift of continence; for there is a spirit put into every man by nature of moral virtues, by which the Lord restrains the corruptions of nature. And though naturally men are filled with all unrighteousness, and every lust is as a hole to let it out, yet God oftentimes stops and plugs up the holes as he pleaseth, that they may not run out at every hole. God doth not broach every lust in every man, yet so as in some man or other, all corruption is broached; some in one and some in another; and in all the barrel is no less full. And though there be a sluice to keep in the water, though there be a less stream, yet there is nevertheless water; even so, though lusts be restrained, yet there is nevertheless corruption within; so that God's restraining of men's lusts is no argument to prove that therefore they have not all sin in them.

Natural wisdom, which doth both assist conscience, and help to strengthen these moral dispositions, and assists against many sins, so Haman, though his revenge began to boil, and was ready to break forth, and he was exceedingly wroth with Mordecai, yet notwithstanding he was kept by his wisdom from present revenge, for he thought to take a fitter opportunity for it afterwards; it is said, "he refrained himself." So Saul, his natural wisdom moved him to moderation, for though a band of men, whose hearts God had touched, followed him, yet there was a company of the children of Belial, who said, "How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents; but he held his peace;" that is, Saul winked at this, and did not go about to revenge it, for his natural wisdom told him that it was best for him to be silent until he had made his party good.

Fleshly wisdom is a great princi-

ple by which the world is guided. — *Goodwin.*

It were a blessed thing if, in matters which affect the interests of religion and practical godliness, the followers of Christ would exhibit the same kind of firm determination as we read of in the case of Mordecai. There would then be a more decided separation between the Church and the world, and less of that tendency to combine the two services of Christ and the world which prevails among us so extensively. If men were estimated according to their real character, and treated rather as their moral worth merits, than with deference to their wealth—if the true elements of greatness, such as the fear of God, the love of truth, and unbending adherence to Christian principle, were honoured by those who profess to follow Christ, and the opposite qualities were visited with the disapprobation they deserve, then the Church would occupy her proper ground, and her members, although hated by the world, would be the object of its secret respect.

“When the all-influential man of power saw the Jew in the king’s gate, that he stood not up nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.” He had come out from the banquet, we are told, joyful and with a glad heart. And no wonder; for the honour which had been conferred upon him, of being invited to such an entertainment, was higher than usually fell to the lot of the most exalted subject. He seemed now to be secure in the possession of his dignities and influence, when he stood so high in the favour both of the king and of the queen. Visions of still greater grandeur and wealth than he had yet attained floated before his mind; and as he passed along, receiving the profound homage of the servile crowd of attendants, who knelt as he approached, and shaded their eyes, as if it had been presumptuous to look upon the face of so great a man, he was the more pulled up with a sense of his own pre-eminence. But all at once he comes to the spot where Mordecai sits, and here his triumph ends. The Jew takes no more notice of

him than if he were the humblest officer about the court, excepting that there is in his countenance an expression of contempt, and perhaps of dislike. This scorn is like a dagger in Haman’s heart. All the feelings of self-gratulation which he had so pleasingly cherished, and the visions of yet higher honour which he was to attain, are at once dissipated, and he retires to his house, with the mingled passions of anger, and hatred, and revenge burning in his bosom. It is remarkable, and it is profitable to notice, how completely worldly men lie at the mercy of very trifling incidents for the preservation of their comfort and happiness. A circumstance in itself of no importance, falling out unexpectedly, will have the effect of disturbing and deranging the whole train of their enjoyments. A little matter, which you would think scarcely worth their notice, is poison in the cup of their pleasures, and converts their satisfaction into exquisite misery. Haman’s case finds many parallels. We have referred to the subject before: we may allude to it again. From the banquet and the gay assembly, from which it might have been supposed that all vexation, and care, and trouble would be excluded, the votaries of fashion frequently part with such bitterness of spirit, as to make them the objects rather of pity than of envy. A supposed slight, a contemptuous glance, a suspicious whisper, a preference shown to some other party over them by those whose favour and patronage are regarded as of consequence, will throw a deep cloud of disquietude and discontent over the minds of those lovers of vanity, which distresses them more than many of the real ills of life would do. In this way it is that the proud, and vain, and frivolous are partly punished, even in this life, for their sin and folly. They carry about in their own breast the materials which, by a just retribution, turn their sweetest enjoyments into gull and wormwood.

The chief lesson which is evidently deducible from the verse before us is founded upon the contrast between the two individuals mentioned in it—Mor-

decai and Haman;—between the servant of God and the wicked enemy of God's people. Mordecai occupied the subordinate place; and not only so, but he was, with all his countrymen, doomed to death in consequence of the royal edict. He had done good service to the king, even to the preservation of his life, but for that service he had received no reward. If he had been of morbid temper, he would have been dissatisfied on this account; and more especially, with the prospect before him of the coming evil, he would have been unfitted for all his ordinary duties. Only three days before he was running about in sackcloth—wailing, and refusing to be comforted. But now he is in his ordinary dress, and in his usual place, as calm and composed as if all his affairs had been most prosperous, and with as independent and manly a spirit and as unabashed countenance as if he had had nothing to dread. We may truly say of him, then, that in the midst of his trials he was happy. There, again, is Haman, who is the next man to the king, and who really possesses more power, because he can mould the king to his purposes. Rank, wealth, and honour are his, sufficient, it might be thought, to satisfy the most ambitious mind. Thousands bow before him,—his will is law,—the lives and destinies of millions are in his hand,—he can rule everything but his own spirit. Here, however, he is a slave—a slave to fiendish passions. And in consequence of this, because Mordecai the Jew would not do him reverence, he is frantic with rage. He forgets all the real benefits he enjoys by reason of the slight put upon him by this one man. It needs no argument to prove which of these two persons is truly the greater character, and which of them is most entitled to our respect. But how, it may be asked, came Mordecai to be able to bear with such equanimity the pressure of real trouble, while his enemy was all discomposed by an imaginary wrong, or by that which, if it was a real injury, he could so well afford to overlook? The answer to this question is easily given. Mordecai's heart and mind were under the influence of the word of God. He

had committed to him the whole issue of that affair in which all the Jews were so deeply interested. He could thus look forward with good hope to a happy deliverance from danger, through the interposition of the God of Abraham, who had told his people that he was the shield and the reward of all who trusted in him. Mordecai, therefore, possessed his soul in patience, assured that some outlet would be found from the threatened danger. Haman, on the other hand, was destitute of all fear of God, and unaccustomed to lay any restraint upon his passions, except when self-interest prompted him so to do. His success in life had only stimulated the evil principles of his nature, and rendered him haughty, imperious, and revengeful, where he had power to gratify his dispositions. He was therefore capable of any villany, and incapable of enjoying the blessings of his condition, as all must be who are strangers to self-government.—*Davidson*.

Haman refrained himself.—It is a circumstance not unworthy of notice, that even those persons who are habitually self-willed, and destitute of the power of self-government, can nevertheless, when occasion requires it, exercise a wonderful control over both their speech and their passions. Thus, for example, a man who is addicted to the sin of profane swearing, will be found to put such guard upon his words in the presence of a superior who detests that sin, that not one oath will escape from his lips. A man who has no command of his temper at ordinary times, will appear smooth and unruffled in his intercourse with those on whom he is dependent, or whose good opinion he desires to gain. A man given to excess in the indulgence of his appetites, will be careful not to transgress in company where it would be accounted shameful. Now there is an important principle involved in all this, deeply affecting the moral responsibility of such men for all their conduct. For if they can lay themselves under such restraint—when it serves their purpose—that long-formed habits can be checked and mastered, then we think that even they themselves must

admit that they are deprived of all excuse when they suffer themselves to be usually governed by these habits. And if regard for the opinions and feelings of their fellow-men exerts a power over them which the law of God does not possess, then manifestly they are chargeable with the guilt of standing more in awe of men than of God. These remarks have been suggested by the words of the text, that "Haman refrained himself." So sorely galled as he was by Mordecai's contemptuous look and attitude, he did not openly give vent to his passion. It must have been a hard struggle; but he contrived to conceal his wrath, so as to appear in the sight of all the king's servants calm and dignified, as became his exalted station. And very probably it was this feeling, that he had a character to sustain, and that it would have been beneath his dignity publicly to notice the affront that he had received from a Jewish slave: it was this that prevented him from giving way to the rage that swelled in his breast.

Then went Haman forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart.—The wickedest of men may be not only prosperous, but joyful; though their hands are stained with blood, though their thoughts may have been "devising iniquity on their beds, that they may practise it when the morning is light,"* yet they go forth with a glad heart and a light step. With consciences as black as hell, they are not afraid to look on the unsullied orb of day, or to be seen by the moon when she walks in brightness. Such is the deceitfulness of sin, especially when it is cherished by prosperity. "They are corrupt, they speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens; and their tongue walketh through the earth. They say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." This has often been a source of bitter distress to good men, who have been "envious at the foolish, when they saw the prosperity of the wicked." But this is their infirmity, and they are brought to confess it. Why

should they envy that joy which dwells in a guilty heart—that prosperity which betrays them to their ruin? There is greater reason for deriding them; for "the triumphing of the wicked is short." What a pitiable object would Haman be in the eyes of Esther that day, when she viewed him from the lattice of her window, as he left the palace! "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee."†

Then went Haman forth THAT DAY joyful, and with a glad heart.—That day was the last of his gladness; next morning's sun should not set before all his glory was laid in the dust. Nay, that very day, and that very moment when it was most buoyant, his joy was destined to suffer a dash from which it would never completely recover. Before he left the court of the palace, from which he had come out with such uplifted spirits, a dart entered his liver, and inflicted a wound, which the zeal and art of all his physicians could not heal. *But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.*

There's a picture! standing out in bold relief, and contrasted with that of the proud but worthless premier. The one haughty and enraged; the other humble, but composed and dignified. It is not the port, the state, the pageantry; it is not the rank, riches, or power; the mind and spirit—that is the man. The person who occupies the place of a common porter may have within him a soul that towers in real greatness far above that of the proudest and most titled grandee. He may have that within him, which, while it rouses the indignation, quails the courage of him who has armies at his beck. He who is conscious of acting rightly, has no reason to grow pale at the sight of danger. He who is embarked in the cause of God and his people, and whose conscience acquits him of having failed in his duty to his prince, or of having done evil to any man, feels himself clad in the

* Micah ii. 1.

† 2 Kings xix. 21.

panoply of heaven, stands fearless and scathless, is immovable in his purpose, and will not do a mean or unworthy, far less a sinful, thing, to save his own life, or the lives of those whom he holds dearest.

Such was Mordecai. He had had ample leisure to reflect on his conduct in refusing the homage claimed by Haman. That refusal had drawn down the vengeance of the wicked favourite on himself and his people. But still Haman is "condemned in his eyes as a vile person." He exhibited no tokens of positive disrespect. He would not insult him, he would not rail upon him as he passed, or behind his back. But he would not yield him any direct homage; "he stood not up, nor moved for him." An ordinary patriot would have been disposed to act in a different manner. He would have said, "My daughter is employed in using means for obtaining from her royal husband a revocation of the decree for the slaughter of the Jews; but she has to contend against powerful influence. I will endeavour to smooth her difficulties; and much as I despise this minion, I will for once abase myself before him, and try to assuage his resentment and propitiate his favour, by offering him that obeisance which is so grateful to his pride." Moses did not act on this principle, when Pharaoh, awed by the plagues which he had suffered, offered to allow the Israelites to go, provided they left their flocks and herds behind them: "There shall not an hoof be left behind!" Our Saviour did not act upon this principle, when the Pharisees said, "Get thee out and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee." "Go, tell that fox, behold, I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." Nor would Mordecai act upon this principle. Haman had devised a deed which created horror both in heaven and earth; the devoted Jews were cast on the special protection of Providence; Mordecai was persuaded that enlargement and deliverance would arise to them from some quarter, and he entertained sanguine hopes that Esther had come to the kingdom for this very end. He would

not, therefore, displease God, and dishonour himself, by having recourse to the mean expedient of cringing to the author of his country's wrongs, lest the day of their deliverance should witness his own destruction and that of his father's house.

This conduct on the part of Mordecai exceedingly enraged Haman. Perhaps he had heard of the distress into which the object of his hatred had been thrown by the decree for exterminating the Jews, and therefore expected, the next time they met, to see him grovelling in the dust. But when he found his independent spirit unbroken, and that he neither rose up nor moved at his approach, he boiled with indignation, and his wounded pride demanded instant revenge. "Oh that I had of his flesh! I cannot be satisfied." *

"Proud and haughty scorner is his name that dealeth in proud wrath." Pride was the first sin that entered into the universe. It was pride that turned angels into devils. It was pride that, after thinning heaven and peopling hell, invaded our world, and drove man out of paradise. It was pride that caused the first-born on earth to embrace his hands in the blood of an only brother. Pride has broken the peace of families and nations, and carried fire and sword through the earth. It is equally the parent of oppression and licentiousness, setting the father against the son, and the son against the father; the master against the servant, and the servant against the master; the sovereign against his subjects, and the subjects against their sovereign. Pride has marred the work of God, given birth to infidelity, apostasy, impiety, blasphemy, and persecution; it is the mother of heresy, and has fomented strife and contention, and wrath, and swellings, and tumults, within the sacred enclosures of the house of God. O beware of giving place to this monster! The man that harbours pride in his heart, harbours a murderer, a fratricide, a parricide, a suicide, a *deicide*;—for it crucified the Lord of glory, and still crucifies him afresh in his doctrine and in his members."—*McCrie*.

* Job xxvi. 31.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 11 and 13.

THE DISCONTENTED MAN AS A RECKONER.

The discontented man is a poor hand at accounts. He cannot reckon up correctly either his own affairs or the affairs of other people. He is apt to give himself credit for too few blessings, and other people credit for too many blessings. His distorted imagination plays strange freaks. In looking at himself it is a diminishing power, and in looking at other people it too often becomes a magnifying power. The advantages of his own position are ignored, while the advantages of others are brought into undue prominence. It is not merely that he thinks that he gets less than he deserves, and other people get more than they deserve; but putting the matter of desert on one side, he sees himself destitute and forsaken, though surrounded with many of this world's good things; and others as rolling in affluence, as clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, and as having more than heart can wish. On close examination we shall find that this was the case with poor Haman. He does not here give us his views about other people, but the view he gives of himself is in one aspect very incorrect, and may warrant us in supposing that the view he would have given of other people would be but equally incorrect. Let us, however, seek to take just views of ourselves, of God's dealings with us, and of the world at large. Divine grace in the heart is the power by which the balancing faculty will be able to work correctly. Subjection of the human will to the Divine will must tend to give calmness and satisfaction in this, after all, unsatisfactory world.

I. The discontented man is a good reckoner, up to a certain point. Here Haman reckons up the advantages of his position, and the sum is rightly laid down. There are four leading items in the statement. Look at them: riches—children—position—honour. What more would a man be, and what more could a man desire? Certainly the man who looks for happiness to the material and the sensible can scarcely mention anything else that is desirable in order to the perfection of human happiness. Why, these are the very things that represent the ideal of happiness to a large majority of men. A man who is able to say as much of himself as Haman could say of himself would be the man to be regarded with envious eyes not only in Haman's days, but in Queen Victoria's days, and in this Christian country. We talk about angels preferring to visit the cottage where piety reigns, and where the sacred hymn of praise is devoutly sung; and yet the song sung by Haman in recording his greatness is the one to which the majority the most devoutly listen, and the one they most desire to sing. We speak about God's blessing resting upon the home of the pious poor, but the poor man is still despised, and his words are not heard; while the man who can tell of the glory of his riches, and his influence at Court, is honoured; his feeblest words are recorded as if they were the utterances of a Solomon; he is sent to Parliament; he is made a director of a railway company, and he is the chairman of a Christian assembly, if he will condescend to patronize that which should not bow the knee to this world's Baal. A small amount of goodness as well as of wisdom goes a long way when it is backed up by the "glory of riches." However, we must not forget poor Haman; poor, after all, like too many more, in the midst of his riches. We have every reason to suppose that Haman stated the case correctly. His riches must have been great to be able to promise the sum he did to the king as a compensation for the destruction of the Jews. We read of ten sons. His influence at Court was evidently supreme, and it was true that he only was invited to the banquet that Esther had prepared for the king. Up to a certain point, then, the discontented man can reckon correctly. We may have seen him at the computation; the whole was stated

accurately; and yet the result is false. How is this? How was it in Haman's case?—how is it in many cases from that day to the present time?

II. The discontented man is a bad reckoner, for the following reasons: (*a*) *He places too high an estimate on the mere material.* Wicked as Haman was he felt that these material blessings could not satisfy the cravings of his soul. Poor fellow! he blamed Mordecai, and did not seem to understand that he himself was seeking for happiness and for satisfaction where they are not to be found. The material was to fill and to satisfy an immaterial nature. We all place too high an estimate on the material. Not only our moral but our social reckonings will lead us to false conclusions if we do not give to the material its proper value. What is the meaning of the unrest and the discontent in our modern life? They are caused by too high an estimate being placed on the material. The soul cannot feed on money; good and useful as it undoubtedly is in its place. The soul cannot rest on the lap of worldly honours. The soul must rest in God if it is to obtain perfect repose. The soul must find the true riches if it is to be delivered from poverty. (*b*) *He does not take into account the unknown quantity.* There is often an unknown quantity absent from human calculations, and by careful scrutiny we might very possibly find it out, and thus it would be an unknown quantity no longer. The unknown quantity in Haman's case was the favour that he supposed he possessed with Esther. "Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself." Surely Haman might have got to know that he was not likely to stand well with Esther. Had he never heard of the relationship that existed between Esther and Mordecai? Was he not shrewd enough to guess that the man who persecuted Mordecai also persecuted Esther? It may be well supposed that success had blinded Haman. He did not use his eyes aright. It may be that a correct knowledge of this fact, and a right use of the knowledge, might have saved him from destruction. Is there an unknown quantity in our lives?—a something absent from our calculations which spoils the correctness of our reckonings? We have not thought of it before. It is just the very thing to give rounded perfection to existence. Look attentively inside and outside, all round about, to find out that which prevents you living in safety, or reaching that happiness which may be possible to you in the present state. The absent quantity in most lives is the salvation of the gospel. Without Christ Jesus in the heart, the hope of glory, a man cannot reckon up so as to come to a satisfactory conclusion. This it is which is useful to make up the perfection of our nature. (*c*) *He over-estimates his own deserts.* If it be true that there is good in all, while none are all good, then there was good even in wicked Haman. Whether this be so or not, it is sufficient for our present purpose that Haman acted as if he thought he had deserts. The blessings he here enumerates he takes for granted, as if they were no more than he deserved; while the refusal of Mordecai to render homage is considered not as arising from Haman's want of goodness, but from Mordecai's stubbornness. If Haman had rightly considered himself, he would have bowed to Mordecai instead of being offended that Mordecai did not bow to him. More humility on Haman's part would have saved his feelings, and might very possibly have prevented his downfall. What a different picture Haman would have made in history if he had asked himself, Who am I that all this has been done to me? Who hath made me to differ? Haman's fault is the glaring fault of most. We intone the words, "Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners," and then we go away and whine and complain if the rod of correction be applied in order to make us obedient children. Why should miserable sinners have riches, and children, and position, and honours? Why should miserable sinners complain if it is not found possible to make the best of this world? Is it to be regarded as an uncharitable statement if we affirm that those who neglect Jesus Christ as Mediator over-estimate their deserts? Certainly many fancy themselves whole who have urgent and pressing need of the help of the good Physician. (*d*) *He is bad at subtraction.*

He enumerates his blessings as four, and his drawback as one. He subtracts one from four, and makes *nothing* the strange result. Mordecai sitting at the gate is the one item that exceeds the other four in magnitude. Had Mordecai only known the importance that he assumed in the estimation of Haman, he might well have plumed himself on his greatness, and said that "After all I am greater than Haman;" which in fact he really was; for any good man, however poor, is greater than any wicked man, however exalted in this world. If Haman had known how to balance correctly he might have proceeded more sweetly in spite of his wickedness. Men and women do not yet know how to subtract, even if they know how to reckon up, their blessings correctly. Too often blessings are overlooked, or not rightly enumerated. Where this fault is escaped, the mistake may be committed of saying, My disadvantages quite overbalance my advantages; the one crook in the lot destroys the pleasure of the appointment. One ghost of the imagination fills the soul with terror, and hides from view all delightful realities. Riches, children, position, honours are destroyed by one frowning Mordecai. Haman speaks of one man who destroys all the good in life; the Christian may speak of one man who develops all the good in life, and brings the highest good into life. The God-man brings the highest good. We may speak of riches, children, position, honours, and say, All this availeth nothing if Jesus is not my assured friend. We may speak of riches, children, position, honours, and say, All these avail something, a vast something, as they are viewed in the light of the Saviour's love. (*e*) *He is defective in multiplication.* From Haman's stand-point too much is made of the insignificant fact that Mordecai refused to render homage. Haman made more of the circumstance than it deserved. The imagination of the discontented man is always an unreliable multiplier. Sometimes it is creative. It makes evils where there are none. Always it makes more of the evils than it ought to do. When we have passed through the ordinary troubles of life, and come to the other side, we often wonder that we have thought so much about them. The advice of that wise moralist, Dr. Johnson, to a friend under the discomfort of some sore annoyance was—to bethink himself what a trifle it would appear that day twelvemonths. If we could thus get the power of looking at present troubles as we look at past troubles we should be able to bear them with greater patience, and find them perhaps smaller than we had supposed. Mordecai as well as Haman has his troubles. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. Let us look forward to that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, our Saviour, and then backward, as it were, upon the sorrows and trials of life; and then we shall consider them as light in comparison with the joy which is before. Peacefully should the Christian stand amid the storms of time. "As meets the rock a thousand waves," so should the Christian meet the shocks of the present life. As the oak gathers strength from the storm, so the Christian should gather strength from his troubles. They should develop to nobler conditions. As the light shines on, and sends its cheering rays through the billows that cast their spray over the lighthouse top, so the Christian should let the light which is within shine on, and send its cheering rays through the billows that shake his whole nature. The hope of the gospel is the true sustaining power. Men and women have tried this hope when disappointment has withered the heart, when sickness has saddened the household, when trouble in many shapes has visited, when death with muffled tread has approached, and have found that it could strengthen amid the failings of flesh, and comfort amid the misgivings of the mind, and sustain amid the sore bleedings of a wounded heart.

III. The discontented man unknowingly makes a good computation. "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." It is asserted that this is an exaggeration on the part of Haman. Where is the exaggeration? Was not poor Haman at this moment as miserable as he well could be? His good things availed him nothing except to intensify that

discomfort which he felt at not receiving Mordecai's homage. However that may be, Haman's riches, children, position, and supposed honours availed nothing for his salvation against Mordecai sitting at the king's gate, who was in Divine providence to become Haman's destroyer. Haman is here an unconscious prophet. He foretells his own doom. Truly, Haman, all the glory of thy riches, all the strength of thy children, all the pomp of thy position, all the tinsel of thy honours, will avail thee nothing before the wondrous strength of the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Should we not here learn the lesson we are all so slow to learn,—that all worldly good avails nothing if God be not our friend, if God do not have the highest place in our esteem? Riches, children, position, and honours are desirable possessions if rightly employed. But they cannot satisfy the immortal nature. Mournful cries reach our ears from the disappointed hearts of those who have sought the supreme good in material possessions. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit," is the despairing statement of those who have taken their fill of this world's good things, and have forgotten God their Maker,—a statement repeated from age to age,—a statement which never seems to hush its sad refrain. Whatever these blessings may do in other circumstances of life, they "avail nothing" in the contest with death. Here the man struggles alone. Death cannot be bribed. Earthly friends cannot soften the grim conqueror. Honours laid at his feet are useless. Death's conqueror alone is death's helper. The soul triumphs by reason of the possession of immortal riches. Death cannot deprive of the honour that cometh from God.

Another lesson learn, perhaps a little more remote, but none the less salutary. As all Haman's possessions and privileges availed him nothing for salvation so long as Mordecai was not his friend; so all our possessions, whether of fancied or real good; all our supposed moral possessions; all the privileges we enjoy, will avail us nothing for salvation so long as Jesus Christ is not our friend. We do not know what was the appearance of Mordecai as Haman passed by. He may have looked sour. Perhaps there was nothing on his part to invite Haman to terms of reconciliation. But Jesus Christ attracts by the sweetness of his aspect. His voice is very tender and very loving. In the days of his flesh he was the friend of publicans and of sinners; and he is still the same. He is not only waiting for, but inviting, sinners to become reconciled. With Jesus against us all will avail nothing for our safety and happiness. With Jesus on our side, and in our hearts, all will avail nothing that may be arrayed against us for destruction.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 11—13.

Add unto this a great childlike kind of peevishness; when they have not what they would have, like children, they throw all away; which, though it be very offensive to God's spirit, yet it seizeth upon men otherwise gracious. Abraham himself, wanting children, undervalued all other blessings; Jonah, because he was crossed of his gourd, was weary of his life; the like may be said of Elias fleeing from Jezebel. This peevishness is increased by a too much flattering of their grief, so far as to justify it; like Jonas, "I do well to be angry even unto death;" he would stand to it. Some, like Rachel, are so peremptory that they "will not be comforted," as if they were in love with their grievances. Wilful men

are most vexed in their crosses. It is not for those to be wilful that have not a great measure of wisdom to guide their wills; for God delights to have his will of those that are wedded to their own wills, as in Pharaoh. No men more subject to discontentments than those who would have all things after their own way.—*Sibbes*.

Let us, therefore, when any lawless passions begin to stir, deal with our souls as God did with Jonah, "Dost thou well to be angry?" to fret thus. This will be a means to make us quiet; for, alas! what weak reasons have we often for strong motions: such a man gave me no respect; such another looked more kindly upon another man than upon

me, &c. You have some of Haman's spirit, that for a little neglect would ruin a whole nation. Passion presents men that are innocent as guilty to us—*facit ira nocentes*; and because we will not seem to be mad without reason, pride commands the wit to justify anger, and so one passion maintains and feeds another.—*Sibbes*.

Look what comforts men have at present in their possession and at command! what excellencies or endowments! men love to be alone to study and think of them; and when they are sequestered from the present use of them, yet they will then be again and again recounting and casting of them up, taking a survey of their happiness in them, applauding their own hearts in their conditions; and as rich men that love money, love to be looking on it, and telling it over; so do men to be summing up their comforts and privileges they enjoy, which others want; as how rich they are, how great, how they excel others in parts and gifts, &c. Oh, how much of that precious sand of our thoughts runs out this way! Thus he in the Gospel; he keeps up an audit in his heart; "Soul," saith he, "thou hast goods laid up for many years." So Haman takes an inventory of his honours and goods; he talks of "all the glory of his riches, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him." So Nebuchadnezzar, as it may seem; he was alone walking and talking to himself like a fool, saying to himself, "Is not this the great Babel which I have built by the might of my power, for the glory of my majesty?"

Then greediness appears, that if one lust be not satisfied, nothing else can please us as long as the fit lasts. Rachel, when she could not have her longing, she would in fact die in all haste,—*"Give me children, or else I die,"*—though she had an husband was worth ten children to her. And so was it with Haman; all the honour and riches which he possessed would not content him, so long as he was not revenged on a poor porter that would not rise to him. So Ahab, though a king, had his stomach took away to all other delights, because

that he wanted one bit, Naboth's vineyard, which he coveted.—*Goodwin*.

A little sickness, or old age, or a cross, make our lusts to vanish, though the objects remained, health being the salt to all blessings. In old age men come to say, "I have no pleasure in them;" yea, a little affliction deadeneth a man's lusts, as the toothache vexeth more than the health of all the members doth delight. The affliction of an hour makes a man forget all pleasure, takes a man's heart from all, that all avails him nothing, as it did Haman. Nay, if one wayward lust be crossed (as his was), one ounce of sorrow spoils a sea of pleasure; for, *seguis bonam quam mala sentimus*, we have a slower and duller sense of good than evil.—*Goodwin*.

Take some quiet, sober moments of life, and add together the two ideas of pride and man; behold him, creature of a span high, stalking through infinite space in all the grandeur of littleness. Perched on a speck of the universe, every wind of heaven strikes into his blood the coldness of death; his soul floats from his body like melody from the string; day and night, as dust on the wheel, he is rolled along the heavens, through a labyrinth of worlds, and all the creations of God are flaring above and beneath. Is this a creature to make for himself a crown of glory, to deny his own flesh, to mock at his fellow, sprung from the dust to which both will soon return? Does the proud man not err? Does he not suffer? Does he not die? When he reasons, is he never stopped by difficulties? When he acts, is he never tempted by pleasure? When he lives, is he free from pain? When he dies, can he escape the common grave? Pride is not the heritage of man; humility should dwell with frailty, and atone for ignorance, error, and imperfections.—*Sidney Smith*.

Remark in Haman the stupendous and wonderful judgment of God; for the impious Haman is most exultant and fearless as regards the preservation and augmentation of his dignity and power; and he is most certain also of the destruction of Mordecai, whom he prosecutes

with hatred. But behold now the end of the thing. The impious and secure Haman should perish with sudden destruction; while the pious and afflicted Mordecai is unexpectedly raised to the highest dignity. Let us therefore cast away all impious security, and fear God; so that, walking according to the calling of God, you may be preserved though the sky fall, and the earth be removed.—*Brenz.*

Those that are disposed to be uneasy will never want something or other to be uneasy at; and proud men, though they have much to their mind, yet, if they have not all to their mind, it is as nothing to them. The thousandth part of what Haman had would serve to make a humble modest man as much of a happiness as he expects from this world; and yet Haman complained as passionately as if he had been sunk into the lowest degree of poverty and disgrace.—*Matthew Henry.*

"Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

Haman's misery sprung from his most prominent vice. The avenger did not so much track his path, like an independent retributive messenger, as that it was secreted in his very sin. It is often so in providence. God does not need to stretch forth his hand against the sinner. It is enough that he allows the working of his sin to overtake him. Had there been no pride in Haman's heart he could never have been subjected to this soul-torture because of a harmless affront by an inferior in rank; but forasmuch as he had nursed and cherished his pride to an ungovernable extent, the pain and anguish which he had to endure when it was thwarted and injured was crucifying to all his prosperity and joy. He became his own tormentor. The law is universal, giving to all sin its entail of evil. The sinner may suppose that his sin is not known, and, because not known, that it will escape punishment; but the sin will itself find out the man, and the punishment will grow out of it as a poisonous plant from a hidden seed. Sceptics may theoretically deny the

Divine government, but practically it is beyond dispute. By an inexorable law "evil pursueth sinners, but to the righteous good shall be repaid."

Intimately connected with this thought, there is another of equal importance—that we are not in a position to judge of the relative amount of happiness or unhappiness in the lot of man upon the earth. Surveyed from without there might not appear to be a more enviable man than Haman. If earthly good could make happiness there was no element wanting in his case. From his own admission he had everything—riches, family, exaltation; and all his surroundings were grand and delightful. There was ostensibly no comparison between his lot and that of some contented poor man, who, besides meanness and obscurity, has to bear the burden of bodily suffering. Nevertheless you might never get from the poor sufferer under the influence of religion the same confession of wasted happiness and blighted peace, that we have from this lordly great man in the high day of his abounding prosperity. Let the outward condition be what it may, his spirit—the *real* man—rises superior to it, and is not touched by it. But in the other case it was the spirit which was diseased, and which, like the scorpion when surrounded by fire, turned its sting in upon itself. So that, before we could estimate relative individual happiness or unhappiness, we would require to go below the surface of things and look upon the heart. The most enviable might then be found to be really the least, and the least the more so. Injured pride, malice, jealousy, and hatred, though all unseen, may yet have rendered the heart inconceivably more miserable, and the man's estate vastly less desirable, than any amount of poverty and merely physical suffering could possibly have produced. Neither his pride, the presence of friends, nor the prospect of again banqueting with the king and queen on the morrow, could restrain Haman from making the humiliating confession that, because of one thing which was rankling in his soul, he was truly an unenviable—miserable man.

Moreover, we cannot fail to notice that outward prosperity in an unsanctified heart, renders the man more susceptible to trifling annoyances. He becomes so accustomed to what is highly pleasing that a very small thing occasions great uneasiness. While he looks at his good things through the large end of the telescope he beholds what is troublesome and vexatious through the small. What a harder nature would dash off as a hot plate does water, the nature softened to effeminacy by luxury receives as a poisonous drug, and because of it can find no rest. The more that it gets the more does it crave; and until the little thing craved has been obtained—and yet on the back of it there is always another and another—the confession is, and it is the confession of every vain, worldly, wicked life, “All this availeth me nothing.”

Whilst we now leave Haman fomenting his rage and preparing for revenge on the morrow, there is one great spiritual truth which his lamentable confession should press home upon our hearts. Let a man have the whole world laid at his feet, there shall yet be a void in the soul, which cannot be reached by all its pleasures and rewards—a void which, until it has been supplied, the whole world will avail him nothing. The world's broad way is crowded with eager seekers after happiness. “It is here,” cries one, and there is a rush in that direction, only to be followed by disappointed looks and longing hearts. “It is there,” cries another, and there is anxious toiling and plodding for its attainment; but the cisterns are found at last to be broken and empty. In the midst of this thirsting, moiling, weary world, Jesus has caused his voice to be heard, pleading and saying:—“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”—*McEwan*.

1. In the first place, in the case of men worldly-minded and destitute of the fear of God, there is generally some dominant principle or passion which destroys their comfort, and precludes them from reaping the full benefit of

the blessings which God has bestowed upon them. Thus the man whose heart is full of covetousness can never be happy. What he has, although it is far more than sufficient to supply his wants, is yet so far beneath what he desires, that he will not take full use of it, just because it is not so much as he would have. What Mordecai was to Haman, some imagined amount of wealth is to him; and thus his present acquisitions avail nothing, so long as he cannot get all he aims at. Again, the envious man cannot be happy. Oh, with what malignant eye he looks upon his neighbour's good, and marks his advancement, and observes the success of his schemes, and his growing prosperity! He may be thriving in the world himself beyond what he could have anticipated, and may have all the substantial comforts of life in abundance; but he cannot find enjoyment in them, because this other man stands so much higher than he. What Mordecai was to Haman, his neighbour's worldly advantages are to the man in whose heart envy dwells; for it eats out all happiness. Again, the victim of pride and vanity cannot be happy. The self-importance to which these passions give birth cannot escape unruffled in the world. Men are not always measured by their own pretensions; and when any respect or honour is withheld from them to which they think themselves entitled, they are far more deeply troubled than they would be by any temporal loss. They deem themselves insulted and degraded; they cannot look with patience upon objects which formerly pleased them; and they long for an opportunity to make retaliation for the wrong or slight they have received. This is a case analogous to that of Haman; and those who are animated by these feelings must, like him, be necessarily wretched. I might protract these remarks, but enough has been said to illustrate the principle, that whatever amount of worldly good men who fear not God may have, yet, by allowing some evil passion or propensity to obtain the mastery over them, they destroy their own comfort, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

2. But now, in the second place, I would advert for a moment to the danger to which such people expose themselves. That which the covetous spirit feels to be lacking to satisfy its desires, it will often strive to attain by most unwarrantable means. Hence the sins of dishonesty, deceit, falsehood, and, when opportunity serves, violence and rapacity, are superadded to the sin of covetousness, and men, ere they are well aware, are drawn into courses from which at one time they would have shrunk back with horror. So also the cherishing of the spirit of envy leads to the sins of uncharitable judging, malice, detraction, slander, all of which are destructive of a man's personal happiness, as well as of the peace of society. In the same way vanity and pride stand not alone, but bring in their train hatred and revenge, as we see in the text, and as all history testifies. And thus, by the indulgence of forbidden passions and desires, men not only deprive themselves of the comfort which they might derive from the blessings of a kind providence, but, as one sinful propensity leads to another, they lay themselves open on every side to many positive evils, from which, with better regulated hearts, they would have been completely free.

3. But in the third place, there is another and more general application that may be made of the text to matters bearing more directly upon the spiritual interests of men. Haman, describing to his friends his wealth, his grandeur, his various possessions, and his vast influence, had to conclude by saying: "All this availeth me nothing." There was still a something needed to complete his happiness. Now, we say this is a true picture of the feelings of worldly men, who are destitute of the fear of God, even when it cannot be affirmed of them that they are in any marked manner the slaves of evil passions. There is always some dissatisfaction with their present lot which needs to be removed; there is a want—a something which the soul requires to its full and thorough well-being, which all the world's good cannot supply. That want originated in man's apostasy, when he ceased to have God

as his friend and his chief good. It makes itself felt oftentimes in the midst of such profusion of earthly enjoyment as would lead one to think that there could be no want there. It will make itself be felt awfully when the soul hovers on the brink of eternity. Now this want the Gospel of Christ supplies. Through the acceptance of him by faith as the Redeemer of the lost, the light of God's countenance shines upon the soul, and God himself comes again to be enjoyed as the soul's chief good and portion. Then providential blessings, and chastisements also, are felt to be good; yea, all things work together for good to them that believe in the Son of God, for they are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

Yet let me here, before concluding the present lecture, remind you that the feeling of dissatisfaction with earthly good does not of itself indicate a spiritual mind, although sometimes it is unhappily mistaken for it. I have referred to the soul's want as felt and expressed not unfrequently when death approaches. And so it is, that under deep suffering, and after long-protracted illness, the confession will be made that the world cannot satisfy, and that the strength has been spent for that which is not bread. But, my friends, do not wait till that time ere you make the confession and seek the better portion. Why should you live under the pressure of a felt want which can be at this moment supplied? Why should you, under the dominance of some evil principle, deprive yourselves of the right relish for the good gifts of God, by saying: "All this availeth me nothing, while the very thing I long for is not given me." Does not the Saviour declare, with reference to earthly good: "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." Trust his word, then, and take himself, and your soul will have substantial and imperishable realities to feast upon. Amen.—*Davidson.*

Ver. 13.—*Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

Haman himself confesses the vanity of his high-swelling words. Why does he talk of his riches, of his children, of the favour of the king and queen, of the grandeur of his condition? That his friends might congratulate him as the happiest man in the king's dominions. Yet with the same breath he declares himself unhappy. He confesses, that all that confluence of blessings which swelled him with pride, were not blessings to him, because a certain man whom he despised did not bow the knee to him.

There are few who will confess so plainly as Haman the weakness of their own spirit. Men are ashamed to say that trifles disturb their minds, and deprive them of self-enjoyment. But it is certain, that numbers, like Haman, are miserable amidst the means of happiness, because they want a disposition for enjoying happiness. They are so unreasonable, that a thousand enjoyments lose their relish, for the want of something else which they cannot obtain. "A good man is satisfied from himself;" and he that is not satisfied from himself, will not be satisfied from anything without him. He is like a sick man surrounded with the richest dainties. He cannot relish them. He starves in the midst of plenty.

Give a whole world of pleasure to a man who loves the world, and the things of it, he will soon find that something is wanted, though perhaps he does not know, so well as Haman thought he did, what it is. He finds some gall and wormwood that spread poison over his pleasures. All his abundance cannot compensate for the loss of some one thing or other that he deems essential to his happiness. The fact is, that the world cannot give a right constitution to his disordered soul, or be a substitute for that Divine favour in which lies the life of our souls. Habakkuk, Paul, and other good men, could be happy in the want of every earthly enjoyment; nor could all the miseries which are abhorred by the generality of mankind greatly disturb their tranquillity; for God was the portion of their inheritance, and in him they had what a thousand worlds could not give. But those who know

not God, and his Son Jesus Christ, in whom are the light and the life of men, know not the way of peace. Whatever they have, they want the one thing needful, without which all things else are vanity, and vexation of spirit.

"I have all things, and abound," said an apostle, who was often in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and who, at the time when he wrote these words, was a poor prisoner that had newly received a temporary supply from his friends. This man had nothing, and yet possessed all things. Ten thousand talents were but a small part of Haman's wealth, and yet he is miserably poor, for all that he had could avail him nothing. The believer in Christ must be rich in the midst of poverty; for he is possessed of gold tried in the fire. The man who knows not Christ, is poor though he be rich; because he is utterly destitute of the true riches.—*Lawson*.

Suppose a man has a very fair house to dwell in, and he has fair orchards and gardens, and set about with tall brave trees for ornament; what a most unreasonable thing were it for him to be weeping and wringing his hands because the wind blows off a few leaves of his trees, when he has abundance of all kinds of fruit! Thus it is with many; though they have a great many comforts about them, yet some little matter, the blowing off a few leaves even, is enough to disquiet them.—*Burroughs*.

Our base hearts are more discontented at one loss than thankful for a hundred mercies. God hath plucked one bunch of grapes for you; but how many precious clusters are left behind.—*Watson*.

Discontent is a secret boasting of some excellency in ourselves, as if God did not govern well, or we could govern better! Should a silly passenger, that understands not the use of the compass, be angry that the skilful pilot will not steer the vessel according to his pleasure? Must we give out our orders to God, as though the counsels of infinite wisdom must roll about according to the conceits of our fancy.—*Charnock*.

To secure a contented spirit, measure your desires by your fortunes, and not

your fortunes by your desires.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

Contentment is a pearl of great price, and whoever procures it at the expense of ten thousand desires makes a wise and happy purchase.—*Baldry.*

Be content; and the best way to be contented is, believe that condition best which God carves out to you by his providence. If God had seen it fit for us to have more, we should have had it; but his wisdom sees this best for us. Perhaps we could not manage a great estate; it is hard to carry a full cup without spilling, and a full estate without sinning. Great estates may be snares; a boat may be overturned by having too great a sail. The believing that estate best God carves for us makes us content.—*Watson.*

"The noblest mind the best contentment has."
Spenser.

"All great souls still make their own content;
We to ourselves may all our wishes grant;
For, nothing coveting, we nothing want."
Dryden.

"My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,

Nor to be seen; my crown is call'd content;
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy."
Shakespeare.

"Cellars and granaries in vain we fill
With all the bounteous summer's store,
If the mind thirst and hunger still;
The poor rich man's emphatically poor.
Slaves to the things we too much prize,
We masters grow of all that we despise."
Cowley.

"Contentment gives a crown,
Where fortune hath denied it."—*Ford.*

The nature of true content, says an old writer, is to fill all the chinks of our desires, as the wax does the seal. Content is the poor man's riches, and desire is the rich man's poverty. Riches and poverty are more in the heart than in the hand; he is wealthy that is contented; he is poor that wants it. O, poor Ahab, that carest not for thine own large possessions, because thou mayest not have another's! O, rich Naboth, that carest not for all the dominions of Ahab, so thou mayest enjoy thine own! Content produces in some measure all those effects which the alchemist usually ascribed to what he calls the philosopher's stone, and if it does not bring riches, it does the same thing by banishing the desire of them.—*Addison.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 14.

THE SPEECH OF A FOOLISH WIFE.

Job said unto his wife, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh;" and if Haman had been as good and as wise as Job he might have said the same unto his wife, Zeresh. But Haman was not like Job; and it may be that his wife and his friends spoke according to that which they knew would harmonize with his depraved and wicked nature. Sometimes the wife is the salvation of her husband, but too often by the natural delicacy of her nature she follows his leadings. We know little about Zeresh, but her speech in this verse at least does not tend to give us an exalted view of her character. Here we find that the wicked Haman is joined to, and backed up by, a wicked wife. We now refer to the wife, and leave the friends alone, for she is evidently the mouth-piece of the company. She leads the counsel; she lays down the diabolical plan by which Haman may seek to satisfy his revenge. A good wife, who shall tell her value? A bad wife, who shall declare her power of mischief? Haman was now far gone in wickedness; but a good wife might still have done much for his restraint.

I. The speech of this foolish wife is vindictive. Here are none of those sweet words which we naturally expect from a gentle woman. There is not the slightest trace of that tenderness which should be the characteristic and the glory of the female nature. There is rather the hard cruelty of Lady Macbeth inciting her shrinking husband to the performance of the murderous deed. "Let a gallows be

made of fifty cubits high." Let the lofty gallows speak of the all-mastering force of the revenge. Let the ignominious nature of the punishment set forth thy determination to glut thy wicked feelings. Revenge is loathsome in any. Never does revenge seem more loathsome than in a woman. The wife, the mother, appears to view with a nature so hard that we can scarcely imagine her capable of motherly feeling. Is it possible that the woman who speaks in this verse ever gloated with motherly love and fondness over the infant beauty of her first-born? But what strange mixtures we are. Zeresh might have run to her child in distress, and have gently nurtured the sick ones; and yet can say, "Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high." Strange inconsistency! Our human love is too often of a mere selfish character. Divine love is not self-considering. It flows out to the evil and the good. Human love must be formed after the pattern of Divine love if it is to work beneficially, and to be ennobling.

II. The speech of this foolish wife is flattering. "To-morrow speak thou unto the king." Thou art all-powerful at Court; use thy power for the removal of thy hated enemy sitting at the king's gate, and causing thee constant annoyance. The pleasant words of a dear wife are encouraging. The busy world does not sufficiently consider how much it owes to the stimulating words of good wives living in retirement, living for those whom they fondly love, living to strengthen their husbands for the stern battle. The faith of a fond wife in her husband's power has but the husband's salvation. Happy is it for the nervous and sensitive husband that the wife considers him a hero, and loves to extol his virtues. A true wife has large conceptions of her husband's abilities. Zeresh may still have believed in her wicked husband. But her flattery is ruinous. Let discretion rule in our loving words. Let us beware lest we be led astray to our own destruction by flattering words.

III. The speech of this foolish wife is cruel. Bitterly cruel as coming from a woman. Cruel if we consider the doom proposed for poor Mordecai; and cruel if we consider the repellent selfishness to be encouraged by the exhortation. "Then go thou in merrily with the king to the banquet." What is Mordecai's crime that he should be impaled on the lofty tree? What has so hardened the delicate nature of a woman that she can speak callously of that most awful form of human punishment? How very hard a woman can be when she sets herself to be hard. The hellish cruelty of a cruel woman is the most awful fact on God's sin-blighted earth. Happy the man so far who has never had to experience the effects of such cruelty! Oh, Zeresh, this is not the high road to merriment! The gallows on which the Mordecais hang are not the means by which it is to be secured. Well, yes, perhaps merriment, but not lasting happiness. The laughter of fools, but not the deep joy of the righteous. Merriment and hanging! The banquet and the gallows! Extremes meet in this world of contradictions. Joy and sorrow tread upon each other's heels. Tears and smiles are close together in this strangely disordered universe. The gallows is raised by selfishness. Merriment is the outcome of selfishness. Celestial joy is the outcome of benevolence.

IV. The speech of this foolish wife was pleasing. "The thing pleased Haman." It was intended to please, and the object was accomplished. Depraved nature is pleased by that which ministers to its depravity. Had Zeresh set herself to reform Haman, the work would have been more difficult, less pleasing, but perhaps more satisfactory in the long run. The work of the reformer is always difficult, and not always satisfactory in this world. Some tell us that speaking the truth always pays. That men at first may not like the truth, but that afterwards they come to respect the speaker, and even give a testimonial. The only testimonial that Stephen received was stones, not curiously carved, not having inscribed upon them his virtues, and not presented by a kid-gloved deputation. Stephen was not likely to receive much benefit in this world from the report of his testimonial as sent to the Christian newspapers of his time. Zeresh had evidently no high-souled

views; she spoke of the present, like too many. She pleased Haman, and thought of no dreadful future.

V. The speech of this foolish wife was ruinously successful. Haman caused the gallows to be made in accordance with the suggestion of Zeresh and the friends. There is a success which is ruinous, and this was one of the kind. Ruinous not to Mordecai, but to Haman and to Zeresh. Our own words are sometimes our own bitter and relentless destroyers. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." In lonely hours of bitter grief did the words of Zeresh haunt her memory, and fill her soul with anguish. As she saw her poor Haman impaled on the lofty gallows, how she would have liked to have recalled the foolish words. But they cannot be recalled. Foolish words once spoken are spoken beyond control. Be slow to speak. Be swift to hear. In consigning other people to sorrow we must inflict sorrow on ourselves. Those who erect the gallows for others should walk very carefully themselves.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 14.

An envious man cannot peacefully enjoy the benefits which God gives him. "Go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself from thine appetites." It is very grievous of wives to urge their husbands to do wickedly. He who digs a pit for others will fall in himself. We must not of ourselves revenge ourselves on our enemy, but first bring him before the proper tribunal. When the wicked are busy to remove from their path what will mar their earthly joy, then, on the other hand, the godly should be diligent to remove that which will embitter their spiritual and heavenly joy.—*Starke*.

Observe how false and vain is the confidence of impious and cruel men, who seek and hope to oppress, and utterly destroy, the servants of God. It is themselves that perish by the just judgment of God, and they are often caught by the very snares they lay for others; while God rescues his servants, and magnificently vindicates them. Goliath and Holofernes are slain with their own swords, and the saints triumph with their heads. The Babylonian satraps seemed to themselves secure, when the flames and the lions were about to devour Daniel and his companions; but the latter were gloriously preserved, and the former ignominiously perished by their own artifices and instruments. Pharaoh boasted, "I will overtake (the Hebrews); I will divide the spoil;" but he immediately became food for the fishes, and a prey for the servants of the Lord. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, th

they are foolishness." "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them." These are the effects of the judgment of which the Holy Spirit speaks by the prophets: "Evil-doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth." Let us therefore cast away impious security, contempt of God, and inhumanity towards others; but let us walk in the love and fear of the Lord, that at length we may come to His heavenly kingdom.—*Feuillant*.

The wit of women hath wont to be noted for more sudden, and more sharp. Zeresh, the wife of Haman, sets on foot the motion of speedy revenge, which is applauded by the rest. I do not hear them say: Be patient awhile; thou hast already set Mordecai his last day; the month Adar will not be long in coming; the determination of his death hath made him desperate; let him in the mean time eat his own heart in envy at thy greatness. But they rather advise of a quick despatch. Malice is a thing full of impatience, and hates delay of execution next unto mercy. While any grudge lies at the heart, it cannot be freely cheerful. Forced smiles are but the hypocrisy of mirth. How happy were it for us, if we would be zealously careful to remove the hindrances of our true spiritual joy, those stubborn corruptions that will not stoop to the power of grace.—*Bishop Hall*.

"Thou canst never prevail against Mordecai by means which have already been brought to bear against his people,"

said Zeresh to Haman, "Thou canst not kill him with a knife or sword, for Isaac was delivered from the same; neither canst thou drown him, for Moses and the people of Israel walked safely through the sea. Fire will not burn him, for with Chananyah and his comrades it failed; wild beasts will not tear him, for Daniel was rescued from the lion's fangs; neither will a dungeon contain him, for Joseph walked to honour through a prison's gates. Even if we deprive him of sight, we cannot prevail against him, for Samson was made blind, and yet destroyed thousands of the Philistines. There is but one way left us; we must hang him." It was in accordance with this advice that Haman built the gallows fifty cubits high. After he had erected this dread instrument of death, he sought the presence of Mordecai, to gloat over his coming triumph. He found the Jew in the College, with his pupils gathered around him. Their loins were girded in sackcloth, and they wept at the words which their teacher was addressing to them. "To-morrow," said Haman, "I will first destroy these children, and I will then hang Mordecai on the gallows I have prepared." He remained in the school and saw the mothers of the pupils bring them their meals; but they all refused to eat, saying: "By the life of our teacher, Mordecai, we will neither eat nor drink; fasting will we die."

But Haman was to receive his punishment. There is a saying of the Rabbis: "If a stone falls upon a pitcher, the pitcher breaks; if the pitcher falls upon the stone, the pitcher also breaks." Be it as it may, it is bad for the pitcher, and bad similarly for the enemies of Israel; for even when Israel strays from righteousness, the instruments of their chastisement are also punished, as in the instances of Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Haman, &c.—*Talmud*.

Haman was pleased with the advice of his friends, and began to put it in execution. But he found too soon, that "he who flattereth a man spreadeth a net for his feet." Haman prepared for Mordecai in intention, but for himself in reality, a gallows of fifty cubits high.

Remember and believe the instruction of the wise man, "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge a serpent shall bite him."—*Lawson*.

As Mordecai's offence had been presumptuous above measure in the view of Haman and his friends, so the punishment of it was to be conspicuous. The gallows on which he was to be hanged was to be upwards of forty feet (seventy-five feet) in height, so that the victim might be exposed to the view of the whole city—so that all might learn that it was no slight matter to provoke the vengeance of the favourite of the king. And mark how the thirst for vengeance converts men into fiends. Far more gratifying than any of the luxuries which he could taste at the table of the queen would be the sight to Haman of Mordecai hanging on the gibbet. "Have everything ready to feed your revenge," his friends said to him, "and then go in merrily with the king unto the banquet." Generally a deed of cruelty and bloodshed for a time destroys, even in wicked men, their relish for their usual pleasure. But there are monsters in human form, as the recent massacres in India show us; indeed as all history shows us; and as we see here in the case of Haman. There are human fiends who, when their passions are inflamed, riot in cruelty, and feel as if the exercise of it gave a zest to all their other enjoyments. Some philosophers talk of the innate dignity and excellence of human nature, but it may be safely said that there is no enormity which men will not perpetrate when they are left to themselves, and destitute of the softening and elevating influence of true religion.

But passing from this topic, we may suppose now, when Haman was comforted by the suggestion of his friends, that the two things which chiefly occupied his mind and pleased him, were the preparation of the gallows for Mordecai, and the thought of the interview with the king on the morrow, when he felt sure he would obtain the request he was to make. "Behold the wicked," says the Psalmist, "he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief: he

made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made : his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon himself." That night was spent in Haman's house — by his slaves in making all ready for the murderous deed of the morrow, and by himself, in joyous anticipation of having his victim fully within his power.

"*Macbeth.*

If we should fail,—

Lady M.

We fail.

But screw your courage to the sticking place, And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep, (Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey Soundly invite him,) his two chamberlains Will I with wine and wassel so convince, That memory, the warder of the brain, Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason A limbeck only : When in swinish sleep Their drenched natures lie, as in a death, What cannot you and I perform upon The unguarded Duncan ? what not put upon His spongy officers ; who shall bear the guilt Of our great quell ?"

Shakespeare.

A good wife, says an old writer, is heaven's last, best gift to man : his angel of mercy ; minister of graces innumerable ; his gem of many virtues ; his casket of jewels. Her voice, his sweetest music ; her smiles, his brightest day ; her kiss, the guardian of innocence ; her arms, the pall of his safety, the balm of his health, the balsam of his life ; her industry, his sweetest wealth ; her economy, his safest steward ; her lips, his faithful counsellors ; her bosom, the softest pillow of his cares ; and her prayers, the ablest advocates of heaven's blessing on his head. A married man falling into misfortune is more apt to retrieve his situation in the world than a single one, chiefly because his spirits are soothed and retrieved by domestic endearments, and his self-respect kept alive by finding that although all abroad be darkness and humiliation, yet there is a little world of love at home over which he is monarch.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1, 2. *Workmen in the tunnel.* Not many years since a number of workmen were engaged in constructing a railway tunnel. In the midst of their work there was a sudden fall of earth, which completely closed the entrance, and shut them up from the outer world. Their comrades outside, as soon as they discovered what had happened, began digging through the mass of earth. It was many hours before the task was accomplished. They found them quietly pursuing their labour inside the tunnel. Their work had never been interrupted. They had eaten their dinner, and gone on digging and boring. They knew, they said, that their fellow-workmen would rescue them ; and so they went on with their labour. Transfer their state of mind to the Christian in his perplexities, and we see exactly what practical faith is. Faith teaches the believer, in the midst of the severest difficulty, not to set about forcing a way out of his trouble, but just to ply his pickaxe and spade in the work which is straight before him, leaving it to the Father above to make a way of escape for him. In the right manner, and at the right moment, the help comes, and the Christian goes on his way more rejoicing.—*Hooper.*

Vers. 1, 2. *The spider's web.* See the spider casting out her filin to the gale ; she feels persuaded that somewhere or other it will adhere, and form the commencement of her web. She commits the slender filament to the breeze, believing that there is a place provided for it to fix itself. In this fashion should we believingly cast forth our endeavours in this life, confident

that God will find a place for us. He who bids us pray and work will aid our efforts, and guide us in his Providence in a right way. Sit not still in despair, O son of toil, but again cast out the floating thread of hopeful endeavour, and the mind of love will bear it to its resting-place! —*Spurgeon.*

Vers. 1, 2. *Christopher Columbus.* Christopher Columbus, if we have a right understanding of his character, was a man of a self-controlled and quiet spirit. The foundation of this subdued and immovable calmness of spirit, which supported him under immense labours, deprivations, and sufferings, was faith, undoubtedly. And it is very possible that it was, to a considerable degree at least, *natural* faith. That is to say, he had faith in his mathematical and geographical deductions ; he had faith in his personal skill as a navigator ; he had faith in his own personal influence over minds of less power ; he had faith in his integrity of purpose. He felt, therefore, that he stood on a strong foundation ; and this inward conviction, strengthened perhaps in some degree by religious sentiments, imparted, both inwardly and outwardly, that self-possessed and delightful calmness of spirit and manner which is one of the surest indices of true greatness.—*Upham.*

Dr. Livingstone's tonic.—This certainly served the great traveller well in the long contest with obstacles of every kind. His work was consecrated to God, and the consciousness that he was faithfully serving him gave strength in the midst of weakness, and saved him from despair. One

month before his death he wrote : " Nothing earthly will make me give up my work in despair. I encourage myself in the Lord my God, and go forward." It was this spirit that sustained him from the first. He might be prostrated again and again by bodily illness, but nothing could make him an invalid Christian, even for a day.

Singing in prison.—On one occasion some of the converts were apprehended, and unjustly put in prison. One of the party was the native preacher. They were kept in prison several days. The Sabbath came round, and though shut up, like Paul and Silas, they determined to worship God in the jail. They sang aloud the praises of God. Their keepers came to forbid and scold them ; the native preacher then began to preach to them. At length the chief officer of the *Zemindhar* was obliged to set them at liberty, saying, " What can we do with these people ? If we imprison them they sing ; if we scold them, they preach and argue."

When *Madame Guyon* was imprisoned in the Castle of Vincennes, in 1695, she not only sang, but wrote songs of praise unto her God.

Vers. 1, 2. *Martyr's heroism.* When the executioner went behind Jerome of Prague to set fire to the pile, " Come here," said the martyr, " and kindle it before my eyes ; for if I dreaded such a sight, I should never have come to this place when I had a free opportunity to escape." The fire was kindled, and he then sang a hymn, which was soon finished by the encircling flames. Algerius, an Italian martyr, thus wrote from his prison, a little before his death : " Who would believe that in this dungeon I should find a paradise so pleasant ?—in a place of sorrow and death, tranquillity, and hope, and life ; where others weep, I rejoice." Wishart, when in the fire which removed him from the world, exclaimed : " The flame doth torment my body, but no whit abates my spirits."—*New Cyclopædia of Anecdote.*

Vers. 1, 2. *Faith the soul's venture.* Faith is nothing else but the soul's venture. It ventures to Christ, in opposition to all legal terrors ; it ventures on Christ, in opposition to our guiltiness ; it ventures for Christ, in opposition to all difficulties and discouragements.—*W. Bridge.*

Ver. 2. *A bold petitioner.* The Romans had a law that no person should approach the emperor's tent in the night, upon pain of death ; but it once happened that a soldier was found in that situation, with a petition in his hand, waiting for an opportunity of presenting it. He was apprehended, and going to be immediately executed ; but the emperor, having overheard the matter in his pavilion, cried aloud, saying, " If the petition be for himself, let him die ; if for another, spare his life." Upon inquiry, it was found that the generous soldier prayed for the lives of his two comrades who had been taken asleep on the watch. The emperor nobly forgave them all.—*Biblical Museum.*

Vers. 3, 5. *Alexander the Great.* Alexander the Great had a famous but indigent philosopher in his Court, who, on one occasion, being particularly straitened in his circumstances, applied to his patron for aid. Alexander at once gave him a commission to receive of his treasurer what-

ever he wanted. He immediately demanded, in his sovereign's name, ten thousand pounds. The treasurer, before complying, waited upon the king, and told him how exorbitant he thought the sum. Alexander heard him with patience, and then replied : " Let the money be instantly paid ; I am delighted with this philosopher's way of thinking ; by the largeness of his request, he shows the high idea he has conceived both of my superior wealth and my royal munificence."

Vers. 3, 5. *Theodosius and Sigismund.* Theodosius, Archbishop of Cologne, when the Emperor Sigismund demanded of him the directest and most compendious way how to obtain true happiness, made answer in brief thus : " Perform when thou art well what thou promisedst when thou wast sick." David did so ; he made vows in war, and paid them in peace. And thus should all good men do, not like the cunning devil, of whom the epigrammist thus writeth :

" Egrotat dæmon, monachus tunc esse volebat ;
Convalluit dæmon, monachus tunc esse nolebat."

Well Englished—

" The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be ;
The devil got well, the devil a monk was he."

Nor like unto many now-a-days, that if God's hand but lie somewhat heavy upon them, oh ! what promises, what engagements are there for amendment of life ! How like unto marble against rain do they seem to sweat and melt, but still retain their hardness ; let but the rod be taken off their backs, or health restored, then as their bodies live their vows die, all is forgotten ; nay, many times it so falleth out, that they are far worse than ever they were before.—*Spencer.*

Ingratitude to God.—The English proverb says, " The river past and God forgotten," to express with how mournful a frequency, he whose assistance was invoked—it may have been earnestly in the moment of peril—is remembered no more so soon as by his help the danger has been surmounted. And the Italian form of it sounds a still sadder depth of ingratitude : " The peril passed, the saint mocked," the vows made to him in peril remaining unperformed in safety, and he treated somewhat as in Greek story Juno was treated by Mandrabulus the Samian, who having, under her auspices and through her direction, discovered a gold mine, in his instant gratitude vowed to her a golden ram, which he presently exchanged in intention for a silver one, and again this for a very small brass one, and this for nothing at all.—*Trench.*

Ver. 3. *God's promises conditional.* A proclamation is read, wherein a Christian king grants honour and wealth to certain of his subjects, with assurance of donation on their just demand. One amongst the multitude leaps at the news, springs away, and stays not to hear it out ; there is a condition following, provided first, that they put on arms, and expel the Turk which infests some part of his dominions. This man comes one of the foremost to demand the promised honours ; he is asked for a testimony of his valour and service in the wars. Alas, he never tarried to hear that condition, and therefore lost the retri-

bution. Thus it is that God promiseth eternal life to men; withal chargeth them to believe in Christ, and to do their faithful service against the world, the flesh, and the devil; but so it is, that many are quite lost, for not staying to hear the proclamation of the Gospel out, they run away with opinion of sufficient belief, and never think of obedience; whereas the promises of God are conditional. As there is a reward promised, so there is a condition promised; it must be our obedience first, and then comes in God's recompence; our devotion goes before, and his retribution follows after.—*Spencer*.

Vers. 6, 8. *Gossner*. Standing by his grave, one said of him, that was not hyperbole, "He prayed up the walls of an hospital, and the hearts of the nurses; he prayed mission-stations into being, and missionaries into faith; he prayed open the hearts of the rich, and gold from the most distant lands." And as for his sermons, the power of the Word did not lie so much in the thoughts, or in the art of the preacher, as in prayer. Prayer was his atmosphere; he could not live without it. So soon as he came to Berlin, he gathered a few round him for prayer. They continued in prayer while he lived. He could not be present where it was excluded. The Bible Society had determined to open its committee meetings only with silent prayer; he protested, and the protest showed how deeply his heart was sunk in the heart of Christ. "A Bible society that does not begin with prayer is to my mind a synagoga profanorum. I do not despise a short silent prayer; but it is too little at a Bible Society, and no more than if a nurse said to a child, 'Make a curtsy,' and it made it, and that was all. If I went to the meeting and sought prayer, and it was forbidden, I would take my hat and stick and run out as if a mad dog had bitten me. If I could raise the dead, I would go to Wittenberg and call Luther out of his grave, and Spener, and Arndt, and Andreä, and bring them to the Bible Society at Berlin, and let them decide."—*Stevenson's Praying and Working*.

Vers. 6, 8. *Effective prayer*.—God looks not at the pomp of words and variety of expressions, but at the sincerity and devotion of the heart. The key opens the door, not because it is gilt, but because it fits the lock.

Constant in prayer.—Felix Neff once made the following comparison: "When a pump is frequently used, but little pains are necessary to have water; the water pours out at the first stroke, because it is high. But if the pump has not been used for a long while, the water gets low, and when you want it you must pump a long while, and the water comes only after great efforts. It is so with prayer; if we are instant in prayer, every little circumstance awakens the disposition to pray, and desires and words are always ready. But if we neglect prayer it is difficult for us to pray; for the water in the well gets low."

Vers. 6, 8. *Answer to earnest prayer*.—"At the time the Diet of Nuremberg was held," says Tholuck, "Luther was earnestly praying in his own dwelling; and at the very hour when the

edict granting free toleration to all Protestants was issued, he ran out of his house, crying out, 'We have gained the victory! Do you understand that?'"

Vers. 6, 8. *Access to God*. However early in the morning you seek the gate of access, you find it already open; and however deep the midnight moment when you find yourself in the sudden arms of death, the winged prayer can bring an instant Saviour, and this wherever you are. It needs not that you should enter some awful shrine, or pull off your shoes on some holy ground. Could a memento be reared on every spot from which an acceptable prayer has passed away, and on which a prompt answer has come down, we should find Jehovah-shammah, "the Lord has been here," inscribed on many a cottage hearth and many a dungeon floor.—*Dr. James Hamilton*.

Vers. 6, 8. *Christ presenting our prayers*.—"A child," says Ambrose, "that is willing to present his father with a bouquet, goes into the garden, and there gathers some flowers and some weeds together; but, coming to his mother, she picks out the weeds and binds the flowers, and so it is presented to the father." Thus, when we have put up our prayers, Christ comes and picks away the weeds, the sin of our prayers, and presents nothing but flowers to his Father, which are a sweet-smelling savour.—*T. Watson*.

Vers. 6, 7. *The late Dr. William Patton*. The story is told that Dr. Patton once met a pious friend with a troubled face, who said; "Doctor, you are just the man I have been wanting to see; I wish to ask you a question." "Well," said the Doctor, "what is it that is troubling you to-day?" "Be quiet," said his friend, "and I will tell you! Now we read that God is just, merciful, and kind," said the friend. "That is what we preach," said Dr. Patton. "The Bible further says: 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'" "Correctly quoted," said the Doctor. "Again," added his friend, "the good Book says, 'not one jot or tittle of my Word shall fail.'" "Very true," said the Doctor. "Now," said the anxious friend, "if all that I have quoted is correct, and the Bible be true, I want to ask you how it is, Doctor, that I have been praying to God for the last thirty years that he will do certain things for me, and, so far as I know, not a single thing that I have asked for has been granted? Pray tell me why I have not received answers to my prayers?" The Doctor replied: "My friend, did it ever occur to you that you were presenting bills to God and asking payment for the same before they were due?"—*Christian Age*.

Vers. 6. *Protection through prayer*. In a village in Germany, a poor widow was lying sick in bed, when suddenly a party of soldiers came into the room. They said they had been sent to stay at her house, and in a violent way they demanded bread, and meat, and beer. The poor woman said she had not bread enough in the house for herself and her little ones to eat, and that for her to feed them was impossible. This made the men angry. They began to break and smash things to pieces. They swore at her terribly, and even

threatened to beat her, unless she gave them what they wanted at once. Just then, a little boy, about four years old, who had ran into a corner to hide himself, in terror, when the soldiers first entered the house, came out from his hiding-place. He kneeled down by his mother's bed, and offered this simple prayer: "O dear, kind Jesus, please don't let them hurt mother! make them good to her, and bless them. Amen." One of the soldiers, who had a little boy at home, of about the same age, was very much moved by the dear child's prayer. It brought the tears to his eyes, and in a low voice he said: "Comrades, let's go somewhere else. In a house where a pious child like this lives, God himself must dwell. This is no place for us. Let's go." They did go; but before going, the soldier put two pieces of money in the hand of the child.—*Rev. R. Newton.*

Ver. 6. *Family prayers.* Family prayers will be a secular advantage. A father went into the war to serve his country. His children stayed and cultured the farm. His wife prayed. One of the sons said afterward, "Father is fighting, and we are digging, and mother is praying." "Ah!" said some one, "praying, and digging, and fighting, will bring us out of our national troubles." We may say in the morning, "Give me this day my daily bread," and sit down in idleness and starve to death; but prayer and hard work will give a livelihood to any family. Family religion pays for both worlds. Let us have an altar in each one of our households. You may not be able to formulate a prayer. Then there are Philip Henry's prayers, and there are McDuff's prayers, and there are Philip Doddridge's prayers, and there are the Episcopal Church prayers, and there are scores of books with supplications just suited to the domestic circle. I have been told that in the White House at Washington every day the President's family kneel, and recite the Lord's prayer. Family prayers in the White House have kept the Administration cool and calm, while much of the time Congress has been playing the fool.—*Talmage.*

Ver. 13. *Selfishness.* Haman as a type. We are all too slow to learn the lesson, "Thou art the man;" so that, whilst one's thoughts centre upon Haman, the victim of selfishness, we can with difficulty realize the antitype in ourselves. Nevertheless, the scene in Shushan the palace is a scene in every-day life. The world is a palace of vanity, and abounds with Hamans. "I would have this or that," is the utterance of the soul coveting some longed-for possession. It has it, and it is not satisfied. How can it? An immortal be satisfied with the painted, tinselled finery of fading time! It asks for some near object. "Oh that I had but that!" It obtains it, and its appetite is but whetted for more. Another prize, and another disappointment; another tide of homage, fame, adulation, and another ebbing, with only worthless weeds left on the forsaken shore. Another freight of honour to Haman, and another unbending figure in the rear, whose dark shadow lies outspread upon his pathway, so that all he hath availeth him nothing.—"he is not satisfied." If all this then availeth nothing,

what will avail? Now "sin," says Bishop Reynolds, "put bitterness into the soul, that it cannot relish the creature, and it put vanity into the creature that it cannot satisfy the soul; therefore the creature, so long as it is empty of God, must needs be full of vanity and vexation." Hence no one can be truly happy and contented, be his possessions ever so large and splendid, till he grasp by faith the "pearl of great price;" then envy dies, and Mordecai vanishes.—*New Cyclopædia of Anecdote.*

Ver. 11. *The ungodly Pope.* A certain Pope had engraved upon the gates of his new-built college: "Utrecht (where he was born) planted me; Lovain (where he was bred) watered me; but Caesar (who promoted him to the Papedom) gave increase;" and a merry passenger underwrote: "Hic Deus nihil fecit"—here God did nothing. God had done much for him, but for a mischief to him; as he once gave the Israelites quails to choke them, and a king to vex them; as Saul gave Michal to David to be a snare to him; and as our Saviour gave Judas the bag, to discover the rottenness of his heart. Haman telleth what the king had done for him, but not a little what God. God was not in all his thoughts.—*Tropp.*

Ver. 13. *The danger of discontent.* I recall a picture I once saw in a public gallery. It was a scene in the higher Alps. A noble eagle was in flight, and scores of birds were pursuing him. The hawks and other larger birds he could keep at a distance, as whenever they came near he tore them with his claws, or struck them with his beak. Some humming-birds had joined the others in an attack on the eagle; one of them, scarcely visible in the picture, so tiny a thing is it in comparison with the king of birds, was sitting on his head, pecking away, and scattering the feathers as the eagle soared higher. Naturalists tell us that sometimes the humming-bird will so peck the head and injure the brain of the eagle as to cause his death, while seldom or never in a fair fight with larger birds is he injured. The humming-bird is small, and has a small beak and but little strength; but sitting on the vital part, and constantly teasing, he very frequently accomplishes his work of death. The eagle cannot bite or claw him, and he has not the presence of mind to dip his head in the sea, and thus drown his pursuer.

How often is it the case that we allow little things to annoy us, to destroy our peace, and our happiness, and health? Great troubles we manfully meet and conquer; but little things—humming-bird troubles—get near our heart, and we know not how to shake them off.

It is related by a London physician, of a patient whom he was attending, that he was a great beauty. By some accident, one of his hands was the victim of a malformation. The thing troubled the man day and night, and his health began to fail. He could not bear to have fingers so white and graceful disfigured. "My patient," says the doctor, "was also suffering from a disease that I knew, and he knew, would ultimately be fatal. This, however, did not seem to trouble him. It was his maimed left hand that haunted him everywhere, and concerning

which he made perpetual complaint to me. At length he was taken with a fever, traceable, in a measure, to his unhappy frame of mind, and in a few days died.—*Preacher's Lantern.*

Ver. 13. *Literary Jeremiads.* Goethe, the greatest of German poets, whose long life was one success, said, "They have called me a child of fortune, nor have I any wish to complain of the course of my life. Yet it has been nothing but labour and sorrow; and I may truly say, that in seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of true comfort. It was the constant rolling of a stone that was always to be lifted anew." A mournful echo of the old patriarchal words, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." Who can read the posthumous memoirs of Chateaubriand without being struck with the illusive nature of worldly honours and worldly pleasures. Contemporary applause was not wanting to cheer the craving spirit of this scholar and statesman. The author of the 'Genius of Christianity,' and the ambassador of France at the court of London, could not complain that what men call honourable and enviable was denied to him. The following passage from the great Frenchman's memoirs contains a sad and home truth:—"I know not in history a reputation that would tempt me; and, were it necessary to stoop to pick up from my feet, and for my own advantage, the greatest glory the world could offer, I would not give myself the trouble." Are not these like the words of "the preacher, the son of David, the king of Jerusalem?" The miserable lamentations of Lord Chesterfield, a mere drudge of earthly pleasure, over the wretched inanity of a worldly and sensual life, may be considered one of the best sermons unintentionally preached against the inordinate love of this world, coming, as the sentiment does, from one of its successful votaries. Let his own words, penned in the evening of life, tell what he had found the result of his experience to be: "I am now at the age of sixty years; I have run the silly rounds of pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I have been as wicked and as vain as Solomon; I have not been so wise; but this I know, I am wise enough to test the truth of his reflection, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Lord Byron gave a similar testimony to Dr. Millingen, who attended him in his last illness. "Do you suppose I wish for life? I have grown heartily sick of it, and shall welcome the hour I depart. Why should I regret it? Can it afford me any pleasure? Have I not enjoyed it to a surfeit? Few men can live faster than I did; I am, literally speaking, a young old man. Pleasure I have known under every form in which it can present itself to mortals. I have travelled, satisfied my curiosity, lost every illusion; I have exhausted all the nectar contained in the cup of life; it is time to throw the dregs away. He had sought his happiness in the things of the world, the result was dissatisfaction of spirit.—*Preacher's Lantern.*

Ver. 13. *Worldly dignity renounced.* Baron von Bulow had been, during the earlier part of

this century, chiefly engaged in the sanguinary scenes of war. He had signalized himself on the field, and received every honourable testimony to his skill and courage; a special handsome gold medal also had been given him, the inscription was, of course, in German, with the royal cypher. Late in life he attended the Continental Peace Confederation, at which he said, he had endured many hardships through life; for more than forty years he had gone through various scenes, often misled by worldly pleasure, and frequently by infidelity; but now, without discussing the propriety of a military life, he felt in his heart that the best service was that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had rescued him from darkness and brought him to a knowledge of the gospel. He then, with deep feeling, took from his breast the badge of honour which he had received in foreign military service, saying, as he handed it to the chairman, with much emotion, "This I bought with my blood, but it is all over, sir; I do not give it to you, or to this Society, but I give it up to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—*Preacher's Lantern.*

Ver. 13. *Things temporal.* Never, perhaps, in any period of the world's history did literary talent receive a homage so universal as that of Sir Walter Scott. His reputation was co-extensive, not only with the English language, but with the boundaries of civilization. The king conferred on him a baronetcy; and wherever he appeared, at home or abroad, he was the lion of the day. All the good things of life were his. His mansion at Abbotsford realized the highest conceptions of a poet's imagination, and seemed like a "poem in stone." His company was of the most honourable of the land, and his domestic enjoyments all that his heart could desire. Yet he was not happy. Ambitious to found a family, he got into debt, and in old age he was a ruined man. When about to leave Abbotsford for the last time, he said: "When I think of what this place now is, with what it was not long ago, I feel as if my heart would break. Lonely, aged, deprived of all my family, I am an impoverished and embarrassed man." At another time he writes: "Death has closed the dark avenue of love and friendships. I look at them as through the grated door of a burial-place filled with the monuments of those who once were dear to me, and with no other wish than that it may open for me at no distant period." And again: "Some new objection or complaint comes every moment. Sickesses come thicker and thicker; friends are fewer and fewer. The recollections of youth, health, and powers of activity neither improved nor enjoyed, is a poor ground of comfort. The best is, the long halt will arrive at length and close all." And the long halt did arrive. Not long before he died, Sir Walter Scott requested his daughter to wheel him to his desk. She then put a pen into his hand, but his fingers refused to do their office. Silent tears rolled down his cheeks. "Take me back to my own room," he said; "there is no rest for Sir Walter but in his grave." A few days after this he died, realizing, in reference to all his fame, honour, and renown, the truth of Solomon,

"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Campbell, the author of the 'Pleasures of Hope,' in his old age wrote: "I am alone in the world. My wife and the child of my hopes are dead; my surviving child is consigned to a living tomb—a lunatic asylum; my old friends, brothers, sisters, are dead, all but one, and she too is dying; my last hopes are blighted. As for fame, it is a bubble that must soon burst. Earned for others, shared with others, it was sweet; but at my age, to my own solitary experience, it is bitter. Left in my chamber alone by myself, is it wonderful my philosophy at times takes flight; that I rush into company, resort to that which blunts but heals no pang; and then, sick of the world, and dissatisfied with myself, shrink back into solitude?" And in this state of mind he died.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the great orator, made an almost similar confession. He perished in wretchedness and want. His last words were: "I am absolutely undone."—*Preacher's Lantern*.

Ver. 13. *Honour from man*. The meaning of the words, "In honour preferring one another," appears to be this: Consider all your brethren are more worthy than yourself; and let neither grief nor envy affect your mind at seeing another honoured and yourself neglected. This is a hard lesson, and very few persons learn it thoroughly. If we wish to see our brethren honoured, still it is with the secret condition in our own minds that we be honoured more than they. We have no objection to the elevation of others, provided we may be at the head. But who can bear to be even what he calls neglected? I once heard the following conversation between two persons, which the reader will pardon my relating, as it appears to be rather in point, and worthy of regard. "I know not," said one, "that I neglect to do anything in my power to promote the interests of true religion in this place, and yet I seem to be held in very little repute, scarcely one person even noticing me." To which the other replied: "My good friend, set yourself down for nothing, and if any person takes you for something, it will all be clear gain." I thought this a queer saying; but how full of meaning and common sense! Whether the object of this good counsel was profited by I cannot tell; but I looked on it and received instruction.—*Dr. Adam Clarke*.

Ver. 13. *The Caterpillar. An Allegory*. "Patience! patience! until I become a butterfly, and then I shall laugh at all my enemies." This was a common saying with a caterpillar, while it was yet a caterpillar. At last the moment of its transformation came. On a beautiful summer's morning it arose out of its dark sepulchre, dressed in a rich golden attire, and strong in the strength of a new life. "Yes," said she, as she looked upon herself, "now I am satisfied with nature! now I am safe!" But alas! she cried. A single leaf could screen the dark-hued caterpillar from many enemies, even from the sharp-sighted hunter of insects. Now, as a many-coloured butterfly, she shone in radiant beauty, drew on her the eyes of a hundred pursuers, and saw only too soon the

impossibility of eluding them all. In vain she plied her new-born wings with diligence, in vain she flew fearfully from bough to bough, from flower to flower. The craft of her enemies surprised her after all, and on the third day she was impaled upon the murderous needle of an entomologist. A dazzling glory is often the forerunner of destruction.—*Meissner*.

Ver. 13. *The death of Saladin*. About this time (1193) died the great Sultan Saladin, the greatest terror of the Christians, who, mindful of man's fragility, and the vanity of worldly honours, commanded at the time of his death no solemnity to be used at his burial; but only his shirt, in manner of an ensign, made fast unto the point of a lance, to be carried before his dead body as an ensign, a plain priest going before, and crying aloud unto the people in this sort: "Saladin, Conqueror of the East, of all the greatness and riches he had in this life carrieth not with him anything more than his shirt." A sight worthy so great a king, as wanted nothing to his eternal condemnation more than the true knowledge of his salvation in Christ Jesus. He reigned about sixteen years with great honour.—*Cary's Dante. Notes*.

Ver. 13. *Alexander and the Cynic*. Alexander, the great monarch of the world, was discontented because ivy would not grow in his gardens at Babylon; but the Cynic was herein more wise, who finding a mouse in his satchel, said, he saw that himself was not so poor but some were glad of his leavings. Thus, had we but hearts to improve higher providences, we might soon rock our peevish spirits quiet by much stronger arguments; as to take notice of God's bountiful dealing with us, that we are less than the least of his mercies; that though we be not set in the highest form, yet there are many below us; that God is our good benefactor,—this would bring us to that pass, as to conclude with ourselves, having food and raiment, therewith to be content; and though we were many times cut short of creature accommodations, yet this would limit our desires after them, and make us rest assured that nothing is withdrawn or withheld from us which might be really advantageous to us.—*Spencer*.

Ver. 13. *Apologue of a Bird-catcher*. There is an old apologue of a bird-catcher, who having taken a nightingale, the poor bird pleaded for herself as well as she could, and seeing divers go to the pot before her, said, "Alas! I am not worth the killing; I have little or no flesh on my back, therefore you may well let me go." "No," says the fowler, "one bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The bird replies, that her notes were worth more than her corpse, and that she would chant him out three songs, for which he should fare the better all the days of his life, if he kept them, than if he killed her. The bargain was made, and the bird let fly; the songs were these—

1. Strive not beyond thy strength.
2. Grieve not too much for the loss of that which cannot be recovered.
3. Believe not that which is incredible.

Now, whilst the wise bird-catcher was conning

these lessons, the bird flying over his head told him that he had lost a great treasure; for she had within her head a precious stone as big as an ostrich egg. At this news the bird began to ply the nightingale in fair words, and told her, that if she would come again to his hand he would spare the meat out of his own belly to feed her. Then answered the bird: "Now I see thou art a fool indeed; thou canst make no good use of my counsel; for, first thou labourst for me whom thou canst not reach; secondly, thou grievest for that which is irrecoverable; and thirdly, thou believest that which no wise man will, that I have a pearl in my head as big as an ostrich egg, whereas all my whole body is not so big." Thus, surely, there are many of these fowlers, or rather foolers, in the world, such as doat in their reposals, setting up their rest in the things of this world, where it is not to be found, and in the mean time neglect to seek where it is; for the world hath no more sufficiency to man's desire than the nightingale had the true pearl within her to give him content; all the advantages of outward things being to man's desire but as sharp sauce to the appetite, which doth not satisfy hunger, but provoke the stomach to hunger after more.—*Spencer*.

Ver. 13. *What Diogenes can do without.* Diogenes walked on a day with his friend to see a country fair, where he saw ribands, and looking-glasses, and nut-crackers, and fiddles, and hobby-horses, and many other gimeracks; and having observed them, and all the other finimbrums to make a complete country fair, he said to his friend, "How many things there are in this world, of which Diogenes hath no need!" And truly it is so, or might be so, with very many who vex and toil themselves to get what they have no need of. Can any man charge God that he hath not given him enough to make his life happy? No, doubtless; for nature is content with a little; and yet you shall hardly meet with a man that complains not of some want; and thus, when we might be happy and quiet, we create trouble to ourselves. I have heard of a man that was angry with himself because he was no taller, and of a woman who broke her looking-glass because it would not show her face to be as young and handsome as her next neighbour's was. And I knew another, to whom God had given health and plenty, but a wife that nature had made peevish, and her husband's riches had made purse-proud, and must, because she was rich, and of no other virtue, sit in the

highest pew in the church; which, being denied her, she engaged her husband into a contention for it; and at last, into a lawsuit with a dogged neighbour, who was as rich as he, and had a wife as peevish and purse-proud as the other; and this lawsuit begot higher oppositions, and actionable words, and more vexations and lawsuits; for you must remember that both were rich, and must therefore have their wills. Well, this wilful purse-proud lawsuit lasted during the life of the first husband; after which his wife vexed and chid, and chid and vexed, till she also chid and vexed herself into her grave; and so the wealth of these poor rich people was cursed into a punishment, because they wanted meek and thankful hearts; for those only can make us happy.—*Izaak Walton*.

Ver. 13. *Joseph Brotherton.* In Peel Park, Manchester, a monument is erected to Joseph Brotherton, having on it this statement, "My riches consist not in the extent of my possessions, but in the fewness of my wants." How happy most could be if their wants were not so many. The great majority want vastly more than is actually needful.

Ver. 13. *Byron's lameness.* It was said of Byron by Goethe, that he was inspired by the Genius of Pain; for, from the first to the last of his agitated career, every fresh recruitment of his faculties was imbibed from that bitter source. His chief incentive, when a boy, to distinction, was the mark of deformity on his person, by an acute sense of which he was first stung into the ambition of being great. In one of his letters to Mr. Hunt, he declares it to be his own opinion that "an addiction to poetry is very generally the result of 'an uneasy mind in an uneasy body;' disease or deformity," he adds, "had been the attendants of many of our best. Collins mad—Chatterton, I think, mad—Cowper mad—Pope crooked—Milton blind," &c. &c. His reverend friend, Mr. Becher, finding him one day unusually dejected, endeavoured to cheer and rouse him, by representing, in their highest colours, all the various advantages with which Providence had endowed him—and among the greatest, that of "a mind which placed him above the rest of mankind." "Ah, my dear friend," said Byron mournfully, "if *this* (laying his hand on his forehead) places me above the rest of mankind, *that* (pointing to his foot) places me far, far below them." "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1. On . . . sleep] Heb. the king's sleep fled away, an unusual thing. **"That night]** which succeeded the events of the last chapter, settled with apparently a most ominous cloud upon the future of Mordecai, but it was the harbinger of a most auspicious day for him. God, who works in the darkness as in the light, caused sleep to flee from the king, and disposed him to beguile the wakeful hours, not with music or song, but by having one to read to him from the **book of records of the chronicles]** His mind was in a mood to ruminate on the events of his own life, and the State annals were called for to assist his memory. Rawlinson thinks that the Persian kings were in most cases unable to read."—*Whedon's Com.* **They were read before the king]** These were in the act of being called over. In the original there is a participle which denotes the long continuance of this reading. **2.]** The name Bigthana is in ii, 21 written Bigthan. **3.]** The king's question means what honour and reward has been assigned him? What has been apportioned? How has he been requited? "It was a settled principle of the Persian government that royal benefactors were to receive an adequate reward, the names of such persons were placed on a special roll, and great care was taken that they should be properly recommended. It is a mistake, however, to suppose (*Davidson*) that they were always rewarded at once. The mistocles was inscribed on the list in B.C. 480, but did not obtain a reward till B.C. 465. Other benefactors waited for months, or perhaps years, before they were recompensed. Sometimes a benefactor received no reward at all."—*Rawlinson.* The king's servants answered: Nothing has been shown him. No favour has been shown him. No greatness, *i. e.* no promotion to honour. **4.]** The question, **Who is in the court?** means what officer is now present. The king desires to consult with him as to what distinction would be appropriate to Mordecai. It seems that those desiring to be admitted to the king's presence had to wait in the outer court.—*Lange.* From this question of the king it appears that it was already morning. **5.]** Haman was waiting in the outer court, till it should be announced that the king was ready to grant audiences. The king commands, **Let him come in]** (a short order) namely, into the house of the king. **6.]** When the king had asked the question, Haman thought within himself, **To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?** Going beyond me, more than myself.—*Lange.* **7.]** Haman was quickly prepared to give answer, and without any difficulty called up one distinction or honour after another. **8, 9.]** The royal garment is one which the king has already worn. Hence not an ordinary state-robe, the so-called Median apparel which the king himself, the chief princes among the Persians, and those on whom the king bestowed such raiment were wont to appear in, but a costly garment the property of the sovereign himself. The highest mark of honour to the subject. So too was the riding upon a horse on which the king had ridden, and whose head was adorned with a royal crown. We translate literally; and a horse on which the king is wont to ride, and on whose head is set a royal crown. We do not, indeed, find among the classical writers any testimony to such an adornment of the royal steed; but the circumstance is not at all improbable, and seems to be corroborated by ancient remains, certain Assyrian and ancient Persian sculptures representing the horses of the king, and apparently those of princes, with ornaments on their heads, terminating in three points, which may be regarded as a kind of crown.—*Keil* (abridged). **10, 11.]** This honour, then, the haughty Haman was now compelled to pay to the hated Jew. That Mordecai was a Jew and accustomed to sit in the king's gate could be well known to him from the records of the chronicle of the empire or from the courtiers, who read the history to him, and who had doubtless also given him still other information respecting Mordecai. **12—14.]** It is quite consonant with Oriental notions that Mordecai, after receiving the extraordinary honours assigned him, should return to the palace and resume his former humble employment, Ahasuerus regarding him as sufficiently rewarded, and not yet intending to do anything more for him.—*Rawlinson.* Haman, with covered head and sorrowful heart, hastens home to his friends and wife only to hear the discouraging prophecy that the unfortunate occurrence will be the beginning of his end. To cover the head was a sign of deep shame and distress. His friends are now called **wise men]** at least some of them, because they undertook to forecast his future.—*Lange.* His diviners now hesitate not to predict his fall. If his enemy is of the **seed of the Jews]** a new and startling fact that seems suddenly to have impressed these wise men; then it is certain that the providence which has ever been such a wondrous power in the Jewish nation, and which has now so strangely elevated Mordecai at the very moment when Haman thought to have slain him, will cause the Jew to triumph. **Hasted to bring Haman]** The avenging Fates seem to hurry him to his doom.—*Whedon's Com.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 1.

A HUMILIATED KING.

It is not to be presumed that this was the only night on which the king found it impossible to command the recuperating services of that sleep which is nature's sweet restorer. Other nights there were, most likely, when the king could not sleep. But on those other nights there might be found satisfactory explanations of the sleeplessness. There may have been physical pain preventing the enjoyment of sweet repose. There were visible or ascertainable causes to account for the unusual restlessness. On this occasion the king could not sleep, and yet he could not account for the restless condition. How is it that I cannot sleep? I have no physical pain. I have no fears. I am not conscious of danger. All appears to be much as it has been on other nights when I have enjoyed repose. The king was now touched by a hand that he could not see. The king was now moved and controlled by a power that he did not acknowledge. An unseen and irresistible force now rendered uneasy the couch on which the mighty monarch in vain sought for sleep. Kings have their master. Sleepy and sleepless kings have their humiliating conditions. All are in a state of subjection. God can at all times use us for his great purposes, but he has need of wakeful creatures. Even kings must not sleep when the Great King has work to be performed. Here is a lesson for all. We must be willing to sacrifice sleep when God's Church and God's world has pressing claims upon our immediate service.

I. A king in need. Eastern monarchs sought by the pomp of circumstances to separate themselves from their subjects, and thus to maintain a condition of superiority. At all times monarchs have been regarded by the vast majority as superior beings. Yet it is plain, and a truism to assert, that kings have their needs as well as subjects. They too are human, and require those helps which are needful to the rest of humanity. Ahasuerus, the monarch ruling over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces, seeks for sleep just as the meanest peasant seeks for sleep in his rude cot. Sleep is said to be the image of death. As the latter, so the former is a great leveller. They know no distinctions of rank. They do not recognize the gorgeous trappings of royalty. A sleeping king is just as helpless as a sleeping beggar. What becomes of our greatness when we are compelled to sleep? The beggar in his sleep may dream himself to be possessed of vast wealth. For a beggar may have his pleasant dreams; while kings may be haunted with the nightmare. Kings must sleep, or kings must die. Kings too must sleep the final sleep; the sleep from which there is only one awakening. We all must sleep the great sleep of death. How often have we laid ourselves down to sleep, and yet it may be, that many of us have never thought of this sleep prefiguring our last sleep? Death is near to us, not only by our liability to accident and to disease, but by its image in our nightly sleep. When death comes will it find us ready? Shall we lie down to sleep with the assured conviction that we shall awake in the resurrection of the just?

II. Thus a king in subjection. A king ruling and yet ruled. He is in subjection to the law that sleep is a necessity of nature. Kings are under law. They even cannot violate the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, with impunity. Philosophers may assume kingly prerogatives. They may patronize nature and nature's God. They may talk in grandiloquent terms about how the universe was framed, and how it ought to be framed. But philosophers must sleep. Philosophers must humbly bow and submit themselves to this humiliating condition. A philosopher snoring is a withering irony on a philosopher talking. Who could believe that the philosopher recumbent, wrapped in the embraces of

sleep, is the same being as the philosopher erect, defying with his tongue all the powers in earth and in heaven? If the kings of men own no other kingly power, they must place themselves in subjection to king sleep. This is one of the great sovereigns that rules humanity. It will not be denied. It demands its offering of time. If the offering be not constantly presented, it comes with awful vengeance. Sleep is the messenger that death sends before to tell of his coming. Mighty sleep, but mightier death! Sleep is a king ruling gently and sweetly. Death is a king ruling sternly and dreadfully. God is a king mightier than either sleep or death. They rule only with delegated authority. They too are subject. God can take away sleep, as he did on that night when Ahasuerus could not sleep. God can stay death as he did in the cases of Enoch and of Elijah. If we would sweetly sleep and calmly die, we must sleep resting assured that He is our friend who giveth to his beloved sleep; we must die in Jesus Christ. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." When the day is drawing to a close, when night is throwing the sable curtains about a bright and busy world, when the exhausted system is seeking the help of its restorer, and is wooing the sweet embraces of balm sleep; how delightful to feel that in seeking the earthly rest we get a type of the heavenly rest, and to say to the body, Return to rest on that pillow which will one day lose its power to soothe; to the soul, Return to rest on that bosom of Divine love which will never fail in its comforting and recruiting influences. When life's evening is drawing to its close, when earth can no more give rest, when with trembling feet we are treading the darkest valley of all, how great the peace if we can feel that we are going to rest for ever where no adverse forces will disturb the divine repose.

III. A king in defeat. Kings have their defeats as well as common men; not only on the battle-field, not only in the national councils, but in the ordinary circumstances of life. Here a king is defeated. Ahasuerus seeks sleep, and yet it refuses to come at his request. He cannot now secure the boon which is obtained by the meanest subject in his realm. All material appliances are at his command, and yet sleep will not be compelled. Sweet music cannot lull to repose where it is denied. Soft couches and splendid drapery cannot always compel the embraces of sleep. It is coy and fickle; and sometimes when most earnestly sought, it appears to fly the farthest away. At other times when not sought at all it comes readily. On that night could not the king sleep. The king is defeated. Here is a lesson for Ahasuerus if he had only been wise. What a lesson on our limitations! Here is a lesson for all. We may know our weakness, and yet we will not bow in lowly reverence to the Great Supreme. How humble should all men be in the presence of their limitations! How little reason has a proud man to vaunt himself of his greatness!

IV. A king in subjection commands. He commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles. He commands because he is commanded. He was commanded not to sleep. He was also commanded to turn his attention in sleepless hours to the book of records of the chronicles. Here we have doubtless the case of an ungodly man under Divine inspiration. It may be said that it was only a freak on the part of the king. He was restless and did not know what to do with himself, and so he turned to these royal records. Such a freak, however, is unaccountable unless we suppose him unconsciously directed from heaven. It would have been more natural for him to have commanded the presence of a musician to bring forth dulcet strains to soothe the restless nature. Or to have called for some calmly entertaining story. Or to have summoned the doctor to administer, so as to settle the perturbation. Imagine the Queen on some sleepless night calling for the Blue Book to be brought into her presence. Picture yourselves asking for police statistics, for the records of crime, when sleep forsakes in the dark and still night; why it would be enough to drive sleep away. It may be supposed that Ahasuerus asked for these chronicles as being dry reading and

calculated to induce slumber, just as some people take a volume of old dry divinity to bed to read: just as some people go to church in order to get slumber. Still the case is not altered. However it came about in human working, it was settled in Divine purpose that Ahasuerus must read in these records, and read at the particular part of those records relating to Mordecai. Ungodly men may be under Divine inspiration. God can use the wicked. But God will use the good for their own greater good; for the good of others, and for his own glory. Let us seek to be good, and ready for Divine uses. When we cannot sleep, when an unusual restlessness takes hold of our nature, what should we summon to our aid? Should we not ask for the book of the Divine records? Let us seek ever to God's word. Let us find in it light in the darkest nights, repose in the most restless periods, and help in our varied weaknesses.

V. A king in defeat listens. A king in defeat is more likely to listen than a king triumphant. The records of the chronicles were read before the king. Dull reading no doubt, but still he listened. When the attention is properly engaged, then the dullest reading becomes interesting. It would require a skilful reader to make these chronicles attractive and lively. This king we may well imagine did not look for the nicely modulated voice. He was Divinely directed to take a special interest—an interest he had never felt previously; yea, it is likely he had never heard the records before—in these dull chronicles. Our times of humiliation are mostly our best times of listening. Our times when we are under Divine impulses are our times for receiving with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. Let us be in earnest as the Divine records are read in our hearing. Let the attention be thoroughly aroused and awake to the subject matter, and then the manner of the speaker will be of comparatively small importance. With some the voice of the messenger is the all-important concern. The message should be that which commands and engages the supreme attention. This defeated king listens with intelligent interest. He notes the very point which is requisite for the working out of Divine purposes; as we shall see more fully in the after-part of this narrative. Let then the whole mind be engaged while the Divine records are being proclaimed. The head as well as the heart must be employed. Listen, for important interests are at stake. Listen for your own benefit, and thus you will become of benefit to others. Ahasuerus listened for himself, and in thus listening he became a true service to Mordecai and all his people. Good listeners help to make good readers and good doers. They benefit both themselves and the community at large.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 1.

God has employed sleep for weighty purposes, in various ages of the world. It was while Adam was in "deep sleep," that "one of his ribs was taken," and made a living being, and an help meet for him. It was while Jacob was asleep, that he was favoured with that wonderful vision, in which he beheld a ladder set upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven—a striking representation of God's providential care for his people; and likewise of that Redeemer, who is the way to the Father—a way, in which whosoever walketh, the angels of glory continually afford to him their friendly ministrations. It was when Joseph was asleep, that he was directed from heaven

to take Mary for his wife; because that which had been conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. He was in the same condition, when he was warned from above to take the Holy Child with his mother to Egypt, to avoid the death intended him by Herod; and when he was ordered to bring him back to Judea, after death had taken that cruel tyrant from the earth. But here God carries his purposes into execution by means of the *absence* of sleep. He is never at a loss to bring his designs to pass. All things are in his hand, and he maketh them all, even those most contrary to each other, to work together for the good of his chosen. "He hath put *all things* under

the feet" of Christ and given him to be the head over *all things to the Church*, for the benefit of his believing people.

Sleep, my brethren, is the gift of God, and an invaluable mercy. Our feeble frames require it frequently, and the Lord frequently imparts it. It re-animates our drooping spirits, and re-invigorates our wearied limbs: with grateful hearts ought we then to say with David, "I laid me down and slept. I awaked: for the Lord sustained me." But precious as is this gift, if we employ the bodies, whose weakness demands these frequent cessations from labour, in the service of him that bought them, they shall be ere long in a condition in which it will not be needed. Our resurrection bodies will be as active as our spirits, and with them will serve God without fatigue, without intermission, throughout eternity. "It is soon in weakness, it is raised in power."

When Ahasuerus was thus supernaturally robbed of his sleep, he commanded the records of the empire to be brought before him. He might have fixed upon many other ways of beguiling the slowly passing hours: but this tended to facilitate the object which Esther had in view: therefore her God disposed the king to adopt it. If he had ordered instruments of music to be brought before him (which was customary among the Eastern monarchs, Dan. vi. 18), he might have diverted his mind, and possibly rendered his sleepless hours pleasurable; but, in that case, Mordecai would not have come to his mind: the fidelity of that subject, which he had forgotten, and by which his life had been preserved, had remained still in forgetfulness, and nothing would have been done towards the accomplishment of Esther's design. Let our contemplation of God's wisdom and overruling power herein, constrain us to say, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."—*Hughes*.

Ver. 1. *On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.*

The king could not sleep, any more

than we, when he pleased. Of what use, some will say, is royal dignity, if it cannot procure sleep to the wearied eyelids? A king, by the wise administration of government, may procure sleep to his people; on the contrary, by his oppression, he may cause many wearisome nights to his subjects, in which their sorrows will not suffer them to sleep. But the regal dignity will not insure sleep to him who enjoys it. It is more likely to debar his eyes from rest by those anxious cares which attend it; or by those uneasy reflections which attend the abuse of power. Labour, and a good conscience, will procure sweeter sleep than all the riches in the world.

On that night could not the king sleep.—On what night? The night preceding the decisive day on which Esther was to present her petition, and the morning on which Haman had a petition of an opposite kind to be presented to the king. Observe how Divine Providence kept sleep from the eyes of Ahasuerus, to serve its own gracious purposes. It is said that "God giveth his beloved sleep." But he sometimes too withholds sleep from them for good purposes; and he sometimes hath withheld sleep from other persons, or disturbed it with strange dreams, for their benefit. A dream was sent to Pharaoh, that Joseph should be delivered from his prison, and exalted to power. Another dream was sent to Nebuchadnezzar, to procure the exaltation of Daniel and his friends. Ahasuerus was kept from sleep, that he might not suffer Mordecai to be hanged.

It is of great use to know how to improve those moments of the night in which we are debarred from sleep. Ahasuerus, it seems, thought he could not employ his waking moments better than by hearing the chronicles of his reign. Here too we may observe the superintending care of Providence. Why did not a prince, who delighted in pleasure, rather call for the melody of the lute and viol, than for the chronicles of his reign? It was the will of God that he should be put in mind of what Mordecai had done for him, because now the fit time was come that he should receive the reward of his fidelity.

"Blessings on him," says Sancho Panza, "who invented sleep." This is a sentiment in which all the world will agree. Sleep is, indeed, as much the true remedy for the troubles and worries of the mind, as it is for the fatigues of the body. In every one's life there are occasions when the gloom of the present is only exceeded by the darkness of the future. If there were no such thing as sleep, a man would succumb either mentally or bodily; he would die of exhausted nervous power, or if it were possible for him to live, would become a maniac.

After some hours of the deepest mental distress, relief is usually brought by sleep, and the sufferer feels his exhausted powers revive. He wakes with the memory of his troubles still present to his mind, but also feeling that he is better prepared to face them. The keenness by which they wound him is somewhat blunted; and this gradual process of blunting is nightly repeated. Thus, by causing intermission in our troubles, it is that "tired nature's sweet restorer" reanimates our drooping spirits. Sleep was supposed to be caused by accumulation of blood in the head; and in support of this view the facts have been advanced, that full-blooded people are usually the best sleepers, and that the recumbent position which promotes the flow of blood to the brain, induces sleep. But it is now the most generally received opinion, that sleep is caused by a withdrawal of blood from the brain. In perfect sleep there is no consciousness. It has been, therefore, called with truth the image of death. It is a temporary death, as far as concerns all action and motion which lie under the power of the will. But although the brain is at rest, the heart and lungs continue their tasks, because they are presided over by a department of the nervous system which acts independently of the brain. The brain is the seat of consciousness, and from it all the nerves which originate and control voluntary motions take their rise more or less directly. The intellectual faculties sometimes continue active during sleep. La Fontaine made admirable verses in his sleep. Alexander is said to have planned battles. In the same way mathe-

maticians have solved problems, and school-boys have accomplished tasks.—*Physiology for Practical Use.*

Earthly crowns often sit heavily on the monarch's head:—

O polished perturbation! golden care,
That keeps the ports of slumber open wide
For many a watchful night.

Ver. 1. This is as it is written in the Psalm: "He suffered no man to do them wrong; nay, he rebuked even kings for their sake." For the pious are so great a care to God, that in order to preserve them he does not even spare kings, but brings upon them various calamities.—*Brenz.*

Let every one bear in mind day and night that pious proposition of Augustine concerning the solicitude of God for his saints: so day and night dost thou watch for my safeguard as if, forgetful of thy whole creation in heaven and earth, thou considerest me alone, and hadst no care for others.—*Féuillant.*

O Lord, it is good to trust in thee in the expectation of thy help! Thou dost continually watch over the souls left in thy care, and thou dost even wait until things have come to extremities, in order to cause the greater exercise of faith, so that none may despair of thy assistance, still at the right time thou art ever ready to help. What indeed is more natural than that a king could not sleep, and that he should wish something read to him? It is this altogether natural, yet wonderful, leading, which causes the hearts of those who experience it to rejoice! To all other hearts this is dark. This wise, Divine Providence is still unknown to those who only live in and for themselves.—*Berl. Bible.*

"He that keepeth Israel, and neither slumbereth nor sleepeth," causeth sleep that night to depart from him that had decreed to root out Israel. Great Ahasuerus, that commanded a hundred and seven and twenty provinces, cannot command an hour's sleep. Poverty is rather blessed with the freedom of rest, than wealth and power. Cares and surfeit withhold that from the great, which passeth upon the spare diet and labour of the meanest. Nothing is more tedious than an eager pursuit of denied sleep,

which, like to a shadow, flies away so much faster as it is more followed.—*Bishop Hall.*

God gives sleep to the bad, in order that the good may be undisturbed.—*Sadi.*

Oh, sleep, sweet sleep! whatever form thou takest, thou art fair, holding unto our lips thy goblet fill'd out of oblivion's well, a healing draught.—*Longfellow.*

Could not the king sleep.] Heb. the king's sleep fled away, and, like a shadow, it fled away so much the faster as it was more followed. Sleep is best solicited by neglect, and soonest found when we have forgotten to seek it. They are likeliest for it who together with their clothes can put off their cares, and say as Lord Burleigh did when he threw off his gown, "Lie there, Lord Treasurer." This great Ahasuerus cannot do at present, for crowns also have their cares, thistles in their arms and thorns in the sides. Lo, he that commanded one

hundred and twenty-seven provinces cannot command an hour's sleep. How should he when sleep is God's gift? And it was that at this time kept him awake for excellent ends, and put small thoughts in his heart for great purpose, like as he did into our Henry VIII., when the Bishop of Baion (the French ambassador) coming to consult with him about a marriage between the Lady Mary and the Duke of Orleans, cast a scruple into his mind which rendered him restless, whether Mary were legitimate ('Life and Death of Card. Wolsey,' 65). If it were his surfeiting and drunkenness the day before that hindered Ahasuerus from sleeping, God's goodness appeareth the more, in turning his sin to the good of the Church. Venenum aliquando pro remedio fuit, saith Seneca. He can make poisonous viper a wholesome treacle; and by an almighty alchemy draw good out of evil.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 2, 3.

A KING'S SORROW FOR AN UNREWARDED SUBJECT.

The chronicles of earthly kings are concealing. The chronicles of the heavenly King are revealing. In the former, events may be recorded and forgotten. In the latter, events are recorded and remembered. For five or six years the conspiracy discovered and exposed by Mordecai had been recorded in the book of records of the chronicles. It must have remained thus for ever, had it not been, as men say, revealed by accident; but by what we ought to say, the direct interposition of God. The records of the heavenly state are not managed in the same loose fashion. All that is needful will be ultimately brought to light. Mordecai had to wait because the Persian king was either ungrateful or unmindful. Saints may have to wait, not because God is either unmindful or unwilling to reward faithful service, but because the proper season has not come for the fulfilment of his purposes. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." Now consider the state of Ahasuerus after listening to the reading of this account concerning the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh; and its discovery by Mordecai.

I. The working of remorse. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? The gloomy and sleepless night is a season well calculated to bring about mournful reflections. Then the brain is busy, and the memory works with unwonted activity. Thoughts come and go in quick succession. As instantaneously there flashes before the drowning man his whole life, so often on the sleepless bed there appears the ghostly army of our past deeds, and especially misdeeds. It is a season for the working of remorse. And we can easily suppose that Ahasuerus required no reading of the dull chronicles in order to stir up grief for past deeds. His mind is not now diverted by the pomp and

circumstance of his great position. His mind was now ready to fix upon this one fact, that a deserving man had been unrewarded. He at once wakes up to the fact of his ingratitude, and asks the question about Mordecai's reward. The eagerness with which he asks the question, the promptness with which he proceeds, and the energy with which he resists the blandishments of his favourite minister, show that his better nature was asserting itself; for even Ahasuerus had a better nature. The mighty monarch may well say, How ungrateful have I been! Here is a man to whom I owe my life left piping in obscurity.

II. The working of repentance. Ahasuerus might have asked the question in a penitent mood, and then have dismissed the subject from his mind. Too many, in moments of remorse, utter a few well-coined phrases, and then let the affair pass away. Even in such cases it is not fair to say that there was no true feeling for the time being, for we are strange mixtures; the subjects of fitful changes, good this moment and bad the next. But the question of Ahasuerus taken in connection with his after conduct, evinces that there was just then the working of a right spirit. He desired, and set himself, to make the only reparation in his power. He had been unmindful of great services, but he will be unmindful no longer. He seems to ask with noble resolve what honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Repentance is not merely to weep over a remediless past, but to do justice to those who have suffered from our previous neglect, or to repair as far as possible the injustice we have done them. One of the Divine requirements is "to do justly." In order to carry out this precept, the man who has suffered from our injustice must have his wrongs righted. Ahasuerus sets himself to do justly to Mordecai. Already the purpose is being formed in his mind to heap upon this man the highest honours, as if to make amends for past neglect. Well was it for the king and for the subject that Mordecai had not passed away beyond the reach of Ahasuerus. Then the king could simply have erected a monument to his memory. This is the mode in which too many seek to still the voice of conscience. The hero starves in a garret. The benefactor pines in obscurity, and battles with poverty, is worsted in the contest, and dies a victim on the altar of ingratitude. Then the nation rouses itself to an appreciation of the good man's claims. A costly monument celebrates his worth, but no line is written to tell of vile neglect, and of a nation's base ingratitude. Even the luxurious and weak-minded Ahasuerus may speak a lesson to those who build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous; but who persecute the living prophets, and are blind to the worth of the living righteous.

III. A voice from the guilty past. Then said the king's servants that minister unto him, There is nothing done for him. The voices of the present are too often but echoes of the past. Ahasuerus was too deaf during six years to hear the still small voice which said there is nothing done for the deserving Mordecai. The voice gathers force and volume, and now it comes like a thunder-clap to the soul of Ahasuerus as the servants say there is nothing done for him. Neglected duty has a voice; if we hear and at once obey, much sorrow will be prevented. If we are deaf, purposely deaf, the voice goes on speaking, and in the dreary night, when all is still, when the soul is awake, it speaks with tremendous emphasis. If then we listen and repent destruction may be prevented. If we still refuse to hear the voice will speak once more, when the only response can be, It is now too late. Let us listen to the voices of the present. Do they echo our past? Do they say there is nothing done where much ought to have been done. Let us pray for Divine mercy through Jesus Christ to blot out our past; and for Divine grace to remedy the past as far as possible, and to do nobler and better in the future. The king listened eagerly and penitently to those preachers who had only a tale of misdoing to tell; for not-doing is in many cases mis-doing. Wise are those hearers who listen to the preacher who declares there is nothing done where much was rightly expected. The king's servants proclaim their own guilt. There is nothing

done for him. We have waited and never urged the claims of good Mordecai. Sometimes in proclaiming the injustice of others we pronounce our own guilt. Thou that reprovest Ahasuerus because he has done nothing for Mordecai, what hast thou done for the benefit of the neglected man? Thou that ravest about a nation's neglected heroes, what hast thou done for the heroes round about thee, for the heroes whose heroism is not on a large scale, for the heroes who tread the quiet walks of life, but whose aggregated worth constitute a nation's safety. Neglected heroes! Unrecognized worth! They seem to meet us everywhere. In the present day it appears too much the case that the only heroism which receives notice is the heroism of boasting. In the heathen kingdom of Persia modest Mordecai meets at last with some reward. In the Christian kingdom of England the modest Mordecais too often pass to the grave, and on their tomb-stones may be written the epitaph: There has nothing been done for them. In the heathen kingdom of Persia the boasting Haman ends on the gallows. In the Christian kingdom of England the boasting Haman sadly often maintains a position of social influence, and crowds follow his remains to the grave. Let the art of graceful puffing be taught in our schools and colleges; let its glories be proclaimed from our pulpits and in our lecture-rooms. No more vainly talk about the virtues of modest merit. The cry is now heard, He is too sensitive to make his way. Solomon said, Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, set not out thy glory. The modern Solomon says, Put thy best foot foremost, set out thy glory, have a good opinion of thyself if thou wouldst rise. Well, never mind, serve thy God by serving thy fellows. God is always doing something for his faithful servants. There is no neglected Mordecai in his kingdom. Let each so live and so act, that pleasant memories may delight the spirit that cannot lose itself in the sweet oblivion of sleep. However we may have neglected our fellows, let it never be said that we have neglected the God-man. When the question is asked, What honour and dignity hath been done by us to Jesus!—let not the reply be heard, There is nothing done for him. Nothing done for Jesus! Nothing done for him who did infinitely much for mankind!—and if we do much for Jesus we should do much for our fellows. He who does not try to serve his race may hear the awful reply: There is nothing done for Jesus. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren," &c. What room for grief when we hear the question, What honour and dignity hath been done to Jesus for this his great work of saving men? It is high time to repent. Much has been done. But when we consider his claims and our indebtedness and our small sacrifices, we appear to hear a guilty past shouting in thunder tones, There is nothing done for Jesus.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 2, 3.

The king inquired what honour and dignity had been done to Mordecai for this, suspecting that this good service had gone unrewarded, and like Pharaoh's butler remembering it as his fault this day. Note—The law of gratitude is the law of nature. We ought particularly to be grateful to our inferiors, and not to think all their services such debts to us, but that they may make us indebted to them.

Two rules may be gathered from the king's inquiry here:—1. Better honour than nothing. If we cannot, or need not, make a recompense to those who have

been kind to us, yet let us do them honour by acknowledging their kindness and owning our obligations to them. 2. Better late than never. If we have long neglected to make grateful returns for good offices done us, let us at length bethink ourselves of our debt.

The servants informed him that nothing had been done to Mordecai for that eminent service; in the king's gate he sat before, and there he sat still. Note—1. It is common for great men to take little notice of their inferiors. The king knew not whether Mordecai was preferred or not till his servants informed him.

High spirits take a pride in being careless and unconcerned about those that are below them and ignorant of their state. The great God takes cognizance of the meanest of his servants, knows what dignity is done them, and what disgrace.

2. Humility, modesty, and self-denial, though in God's account of great price, yet commonly hinder men's preferment in the world. Mordecai rises no higher than the king's gate, while the proud ambitious Haman gets the king's ear and heart; but, though the aspiring rise fast, the humble stand fast. Honour makes proud men giddy, but upholds the humble in spirit. Honour and dignity are rated high in the king's books. He does not ask, What reward has been given Mordecai? what money? what estate? but only, what honour?—a poor thing, and which, if he had not wherewith to support it, would be but a burden. 4. The greatest merits and the best services are often overlooked, and go unrewarded among men. Little honour is done to those who best deserve it, are fittest for it, and would do most good with it. The acquisition of wealth and honour is usually a perfect lottery, in which those who venture least commonly carry off the best prize. Nay—5. Good services are sometimes so far from being a man's preferment that they will not be his protection. Mordecai is at this time, by the king's edict, doomed to destruction, with all the Jews, though it is owned that he deserved a dignity. Those that faithfully serve God need not fear being thus ill paid.—*Matthew Henry*.

Princes should have diligent care that none who have deserved well of the State or of themselves are left to go unrewarded. God knows our acts of kindness; and though we may regard them as lost or ignored, yet he can bring them to the light at the proper time to receive even a greater reward than if they had been immediately rewarded.—*Starke*.

Although men are unmindful of benefits received, and, as Pindar says, "Old thanks sleep," still our Lord God is never forgetful. When God's time for reward has come, then even the zeal of enemies must assist him. However watchful and diligent our enemies may be in order

utterly to destroy the righteous, yet all their acts and labours form only the ground of the scene, which by the help of God is made to serve in perfecting the web of his leadings.—*Brenz*.

He could not believe that he had been so thoughtlessly ungrateful, as never to requite for such a length of time a service so eminent as that which Mordecai had performed; and was astonished to hear his servants say that nothing had been done for him.

Let us take a review of our lives, and consider what we have done, or not done. If our memories are good, we shall be surprised at many instances of our conduct, or at our forgetfulness. Have we showed all that sense of gratitude to our benefactors, to which we must acknowledge them to be entitled? Have we not often intended to do what we have never done, although we must blush at the thought that we have not done it? And can we forget, that amongst our benefactors are to be reckoned our parents, and, most of all, God our Maker?

We are taught likewise by this question of Ahasuerus, not to impute to intention what may be the effect merely of inadvertence. We are apt to make louder complaints than we have any reason to make of the ingratitude of those to whom we have performed good offices. Perhaps they have forgotten that they did not requite them. Perhaps their neglects have not originated in depravity of heart, or insensibility to benefits, but in thoughtlessness, as it were, occasioned by the many avocations of other affairs. We cannot indeed justify those who do not with the first opportunity requite benefits received; but we must not aggravate real evils. Who will say that David did not retain a grateful remembrance of what Jonathan had done for him? And yet several years seem to have elapsed, after he was advanced to the regal dignity, before he inquired who were left of the house of Saul, that he might show them the kindness of God for Jonathan's sake; and several more years passed away, before he brought the bones of that beloved friend from Jabesh Gilead

to be interred in the sepulchre of his father.

"There is nothing done for him," said the servants of Ahasuerus. This was a disagreeable truth which they could not conceal from the king. But the evil was not irreparable. Mordecai was still alive, and the king could yet testify his sense of the benefit received.—*Larson.*

The king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered to him, There is nothing done for him. O ye smooth sycophants, where were your tongues before? Ye were not ignorant of the important service performed by Mordecai. Ye knew well the mean office which he continued to discharge. Why did you not embrace the opportunity which your access to the king's person gave you to remind him of the merits of a neglected servant? You had too many favours to ask for yourselves and your friends. Oh! if Haman had come a little earlier, you would have abetted his plea, and might have been found bearing witness that Mordecai had blasphemed the king and his favourite.

We should not, and good men will not, look for their reward from creatures. The world is full of ingratitude. It is often seen that "the greatest merits and the best services are forgotten, and go unrewarded among men; little honour is done to those who best deserve it, are fittest for it, and would do most good with it."* Modest merit is overlooked, while the aspiring, the ambitious, and the time-serving rise to honour and riches. Nor is ingratitude confined to courts. It is the vice of the low as well as the high—the *sovereign people*, as well as sovereign princes. "There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he, by his wisdom, delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Wisdom is better than strength; nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his

words are not heard."† Ingratitude to God and to his servants are nearly allied. "The children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel."‡ You know who it was that "went about doing good;" and yet, as a reward, the Jews sought to stone, and at last crucified him.

"Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."§ The King of heaven has his records—his "book of remembrance," in which are entered not only the good deeds which they have done in his service, but also their dutiful words and their gracious thoughts. This book is not only written before him, but it is always open before him. He whom you serve slumbers not nor sleeps at any time. He stands in no need of remembrancers, and no adversary can poison his ear to their prejudice. He may delay the reward, but he will not baulk their expectations. He "is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name." When the books are opened, he shall read, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

If we are thoroughly convinced of our neglect of duty, and sorry on account of it, we will lose no time in repairing the injury. Satan is always at hand to divert us from a good purpose. Had Ahasuerus delayed acting on his present impressions, a temptation would have assailed him which might have proved too strong, and led him to add cruelty to ingratitude, by taking away the life of one who had preserved his own.

I.

It teaches us how well a good man can afford to wait for the due acknowledg-

† Eccles. ix. 14, 15.

‡ Judges viii. 34, 35. § Neh. v. 19.

* Henry.

ment of his uprightness, and for any reward he may need for the good he has done. The conjecture is that six long years had gone by since Mordecai revealed the plot of the chamberlains and saved the king's life, and not even a word of acknowledgment had come to him during all that time. At first he would naturally look for something of the kind, for it was usual, it was kingly, on such occasions to confer honours and give rewards; but as time went on expectation would, of course, diminish, and finally, in all probability, die away, so that when acknowledgment and reward come none is more surprised than he who had ceased to expect them. But what we most admire is his behaviour meantime. If he had been a self-seeking man, he could easily have found means to refresh the king's memory as to his services; but he kept silence. If he had been a malignant man, he might have sought what he would, in that case, have called a just revenge for the ungrateful neglect with which he had been treated, by hatching or falling in with some other plot. But no; he keeps his place, and does his office at the gate quietly and faithfully, and without fail, expecting nothing, complaining of nothing, faithful to duty, and fearing God. And then, how well all turns out in the end! How much better than if the reward had been given at the time! Suppose he had got some gift or office at the time, the answer to the king's question could not have been, "Nothing has been done for him;" and Haman's plot would not have been arrested, but would have rolled on, on wheels of fire, towards the destruction of a whole people. "He that believeth shall not make haste;" God's time is always the best. Six years are to the Lord as so many moments. And God's method of reward and acknowledgment is the best too. Seldom, indeed, does it take in the case of any of his servants a form so dramatic as this. We misapprehend and degrade the dramatic element in this history if we crave the repetition of it. It is brought out here in such tragic splendour in order that the great *moral truth* may be stamped deeply in human

memory, and may stand out vividly to the human imagination. You have done some good things in your time which have never been acknowledged, or never adequately rewarded, even as such things go among men. Even a few frank kindly words from the proper quarter would have been something. As it is you are sometimes a little chilled and discouraged by what you feel to be the complete and unwonted neglect. Well, now, don't expect Haman at your door some fine morning with the king's horse, and the royal apparel to make you all purple and gold, and the blaring trumpets to tell all the city what you have done; he is not likely to come; you must do as you can without him. Righteousness is its own reward, and we are never righteous as God would have us be until we feel this deeply and act accordingly. —*Dr. Ruleigh.*

And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Lyra saith that he had waited six years for reward and had none. In princes' courts men are sure to meet with two evils, delay and change; not so in heaven. The butler forgot Joseph. Solomon speaketh of a poor man, who by his wisdom had saved the city, yet no man remembered that same poor man; this is the world's wages. Mordecai had saved the king's life and yet is unrewarded. The kings of Persia used to be very bountiful to those that had well deserved of them, or of the commonwealth; calling such Orosange, and setting down both their names and their acts in the chronicles, as Herodotus testifieth. Among the rest he mentioned one Phylæus, who was put upon record for his good service to the king, and rewarded with a great deal of land given him. Others had great store of gold and silver, and a gallant house, as Democedes Crotoniales, the physician who cured Darius, had at Susis. It is well known out of Xenophon what rich gifts Cyrus gave to his friends and followers—chains of gold, armlets, bridles bossed with gold, Persian stools called Dorophoriceæ. Herodotus telleth us that this Ahasuerus, *alias* Xerxes, gave Megabyzus, for his good service at Babylon, a golden mill weighing six

talents. Plutarch writeth, that he gave Themistocles above two hundred talents, and three cities besides, viz. Magnesia, Lampsacus, and Myuntis, to find him food, and for clothing and furniture two more, viz. Perceos and Pakescepsis. How came it then to pass that good Mordecai was so forgotten? Surely it was a great fault in this ungrateful king—but God's holy hand was in it—that Mordecai

should not have a present recompense, but that it should be deferred till a fitter opportunity, when God might be more glorified in the preservation of his people and destruction of their enemies. Let us not therefore be weary of well-doing; for (however men deal by us) we shall be sure to reap in due season if we faint not. God best seeth when a mercy will be most sweet and seasonable.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 4, 5.

THE KING'S INQUIRY AND CONCESSION.

FROM the conduct of Haman on this occasion we learn that hate inspires a man with energy. For anything we know to the contrary Haman may be but an active man, one who is prompt in business, and who scarcely allows himself sufficient leisure to take necessary sleep. But in this case the impelling motive is hate. It will not allow him to sleep. At the first dawn of morning he rushes to carry out his nefarious design. He is waiting with eagerness for the king's appearance. He is all alert to set a-going his wily and dark scheme. He is ready to speak unto the king to hang an innocent man. Thus there are too many Humans. Alas! sadly too many to speak for the destruction of their fellows. Alas! sadly too few to speak for the salvation of their fellows. How this proclaims the depravity of human nature! It rushes to destroy; it creeps to save. It is eager to listen to the voice of hate; it is deaf to the voice of love. Oh, love divine, supplant hate by the sweet force of all-mastering love!

I. The human inquiry. The king said, Who is in the court? It does not appear to us likely that the king was aware that Haman was already in the court. The king was evidently still in the bed-chamber, whence he would not see who was waiting outside. He could scarcely have expected Haman at such an early hour. He asks in ignorance. This is characteristic of human inquiries. We are ignorant, and desire to know. We ask for enlightenment. But, further, the king was in perplexity and desired some one to consult. What is to be done to remedy this long neglect? Who is in the court to whom I may speak? This too is characteristic of our humanity. Perplexity will come. In such trial we ask who is in the court? Who will help me in this perplexity? Who is there to whom I may successfully appeal? We seek to men, but they fail. Seek to the court of heaven. If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God.

II. The Divine response. The king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. God speaks by human voices. Holy men are generally the vehicles of Divine messages, but he can and does make use of unlikely vehicles. These servants, heathen though they were, were God's instruments. They were working out Divine laws. Why did they at once fix upon Haman? Were there no others in the court? Doubtless there were. The true answer is, not that Haman was the favoured minister, but that God directed them to announce Haman's presence. The king did not hear the Divine response in the answer of his servants, but it was there all the same. God is speaking even when we are too deaf to hear. Be swift to hear the Divine response.

III. The disappointing concession. And the king said, Let him come in. Earthly kings grant their audiences, but the privileged ones find that the concession is disappointing. Haman found it so to his cost. Better almost for him had the king said, Let him stop out. Even when those who seek the king's presence have

no dark designs there is disappointment. The earthly monarch may say, Let the man come in, and then the monarch lets the man go out as empty as he entered. High hopes have often been raised by a monarch's summons to court, but it has only been a vain parade. No false hopes are raised by King Jesus. Does he say to a man, Let him come in? then he means to enrich; and does he not say it to all? To each the invitation is given, Let him come in, let him come to me. Him that cometh to me I will in no-wise cast out. Even a proud, ambitious, and bloodthirsty Haman may come. How sweet the word—come! Come not to further thy dark designs, Haman; come not to seek help in the promotion of thy schemes of self-aggrandizement; but come to be taught a better way; come to be endowed with a nobler spirit; come to learn, Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy; Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

IV. The joyful but fatal obedience. So Haman came in. Haman did not go in like one moving to the gallows, which in fact he was doing. He was now much nearer that fatal structure than he knew. Had Haman lived in our days he might have thought, This is now the tide in my affairs which should lead on to further glory. But, oh! it was the dark tide leading on to destruction. Haman went in joyful, but came out sorrowful. The rosy morning was bright and beautiful; clouds gather on the evening sky. The lightnings flash and thunder peals in terrific grandeur. What a picture is presented to the mind by those simple words—So Haman came in. Haman's mistake was not in obeying the permission of the king, but in obeying the voice of an evil spirit. Had Haman repented during the night, and gone in a right spirit and with wholesome counsel to the king, all might still have been well. The motive, then, counts for much. Let us look to our motives. A wrong motive will cast a blight on the obedient action. See to it that good deeds arise out of faith in Jesus Christ, out of love for his glory.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 4, 5.

Haman came early, but too late. To us, knowing arrangements made on either side, in the king's mind, and in his favourite's, it is a neck-and-neck race. Who should have the first word? The king has it; Haman is lost! "A single moment to tell Alasuerus of the persevering insolence of one of his menials: I need not name him; enough to say that he is one of the race doomed all to perish on the thirteenth of Adar, and that I am but anticipating the end ordained for him a few months hence." No, Haman; not a single moment you have for that purpose now or ever. Alasuerus had no wish to forestall his friend. Had he known that he had a request of his own to present he must have given him permission to state it; and had Haman then only avoided naming Mordecai, the king must have granted his request. It is "another King" who is beforehand with the Jew's enemy.—*Symington*.

And the king said, Let him come in. See here, saith Merlin, a sweet and

special providence of God in this, that Alasuerus should take advice about honouring Mordecai, and not of his servants that attended upon his person, but of Haman then present (though for another purpose); and, concealing the man he means, should Haman say what was fit to be done, and then do it accordingly. Neither the king nor his servants, likely, would ever have thought of doing Mordecai so great honour as Haman prescribed. See here, as in a mirror, how the Lord by a secret providence bringeth about and overruleth the wiles of men, their affairs, times, counsels, words, and speeches, to the fulfilling of his own will and decree; and this when they think least of doing God's will or serving his providence.

So Haman came in, merry and jocund, but went out sad and heavy-hearted. These hosts (profit, pleasure, and preferment), though they welcome us into our inn with smiling countenances, yet, if we watch them not, they will cut our throats in our beds. It is

observed of Edward III., that he had always fair weather at his passage into France and foul upon his return. Pharaoh had fair weather till he was in the heart of the Red Sea. The sun shone fair upon the earth that morning that Lot came out of Sodom, but ere night there was a dismal change. He that lives in the height of the world's blandishments is not far from destruction.—*Trapp.*

Who is in the court? The morning light may have begun to fill his chamber when the king nervously addressed this question to his attendants. He had spent a sleepless night; and might it not be because another conspiracy was being matured against him? Might it not be something of this kind which was troubling the queen? Did he not deserve that it should be concealed from him, since he had done nothing to reward his former preserver? There might be cause

for haste,—at least he was impatient of delay; and who was this, at early morn, pacing the outer court of the king's palace, as though also in haste about some great work? Haman. His night's rest had not pacified his thirst for revenge. There was to be the queen's banquet in an after part of the day; and if he was to go in merrily to it he must first have obtained authority for the execution, and had Mordecai hanged on the gallows prepared for him. How fortunate! thought Haman; the king is early astir, and calleth for me. How fortunate! thought the king; my favourite courtier and counsellor is early in the way this morning, and is the best man to whom I can commit this business. Behind the back of each of them there was the providence of God, secretly working out his own purposes of mercy and judgment. "And the king said, Let Haman come in."—*McEwan.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 6, 11.

SELF-FLATTERY LEADING TO SELF-HUMILIATION.

OUTWARDLY at least self-flattery does not always lead to self-humiliation. But we cannot see and know all. We cannot perceive the bitter stings which must be endured in silence by the conceited man. In his passage through time, in his contact with his fellows, he receives many a stab which he must conceal. And these hidden sores are often the most difficult to endure. After all the herb of humility is a true heart's-ease. The modest man may not make a great position in the world, but he is most likely to possess the invaluable treasure of contentment. Certainly he is not at all likely to find himself in the humiliating position to which poor Haman was reduced. Sooner or later, in some way or another, in time or in eternity, pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better is it surely to be of a humble spirit with the lowly. Better to sit with calm resignation with Mordecai at the gate than to be the subject of those great inward shocks, and of those outward humiliating changes, which were endured by the conceited Haman.

I. An artless question addressed to conceit. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? If we may so say there was either designed or undesigned artlessness in this question on the part of king Ahasuerus. The form of the question was just that form calculated to bring out Haman's over-weening self-confidence. The question was artlessly vague, and leaves room for Haman to conclude that he himself was the man whom the king delighted to honour. If the form of the question was designed, if he purposely keeps the name of Mordecai in the background, it shews a skill on the part of the king which the history does not prepare us to expect. However, it was a natural form for the question to take; and simple straightforwardness is often the most direct mode of defeating the schemes of the cunning and of the conceited. It was so in this case. The luxurious monarch proved himself more than a match for the wily politician. However, we may well suppose

that the monarch was moved by the current of events. The form of the question was not merely of the king's own shaping. There was a higher mind suggesting.

II. The reasoning of conceit. A conceited heart is a bad guide in critical junctures. This was a crisis in Haman's history, and, unfortunately for himself, he listened to the hollow reasoning of a conceited heart. Haman's conceit hindered him drawing a correct conclusion. Some of the premises were hidden from Haman, and therefore he was not in a position to construct a perfect syllogism. He should have asked himself, are the premises that I have occupied a high place at court, that I have secured an edict against the Jews, that Mordecai is still sitting at the king's gate neglected, sufficient to warrant me in concluding that I am the man whom the king will most delight to honour? A conceited nature may study all the books on logic that has ever been written, but its reasonings for all that are sure to be faulty. Logicians sometimes speak of vicious reasoning; of this kind of reasoning a conceited nature will be guilty. To be a correct reasoner there must be a clear head, and also, and perhaps much more, a clear heart. Errors of the head most frequently spring from faults of the heart. Take heed to thyself, and then to the doctrine—is a man thinketh in his heart so is he. Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? Of course not. At this moment self was with Haman the sum-total of the universe. Is poor Haman the only one who raises self to a false position, from which it falls with hideous ruin? Alas, to too many men self is the world. There is too much conceit in all. Let there be proper self-love, but let it not degenerate into selfishness.

III. The answer of conceit. It is an unscrupulous and fool-hardy answer. Haman here seems to aim at royal honours. Practically he was guilty of treason. He now asks to have regal honours assigned to himself. Outwardly this could not be charged against him, for he might have pleaded, I am yet in ignorance as to the man whom the king will delight to honour. And it might not have been as plain to the king, and to the listeners, whom Haman meant as it is to us who now read the whole account with the calmness of unprejudiced investigators. If Haman had thought of another self beside his own self as likely to receive these honours he might not have been so lavish in his description of what should be done. How lavish we are in expenditure when myself, ourselves, is the subject of consideration! How thrifty and parsimonious we become when we have to consider the claims of other selves. Self says, Look every man on his own things. Self asks for itself the royal apparel, the royal horse, the royal crown, the royal procession and proclamation. Self practically says, All this for me and the gallows for Mordecai. Is not this a solemn figure? How difficult would it be for the judge to pass sentence on the criminal if he could make his self take the place of the criminal's self? The world would be much altered for the better if each man could consider properly the claims of other selves. How long will it be before the world practically acts out the injunction—Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others? Here conceit aims at the subversion of royal supremacy. There is much conceit at the bottom of republicanism. Conceit does not believe in honouring all men and fearing the king. And is there not much conceit in infidelity? Is there not an effort to destroy Divine supremacy? The pride and the daring of conceit are insufferable. It would overturn thrones. It would if possible overtop the throne and monarchy of God himself.

IV. The fearful blow to conceit. We can easily suppose that the command now given by the king to Haman was more galling than the rope placed round his neck when he was hung on the gallows. How galling to have the honours I had intended for myself given to another, and that other the man I most hate, the man whose destruction I have most earnestly plotted! The king told Haman to make haste. What a hard command! To make haste is a hard task when I have to carry on my journey a broken heart, a disappointed nature, blasted hopes, blighted

prospects; to make haste when in myself I must carry the hideous ruins of that fair castle which I have just been building with so much skill and labour. Make haste to honour the man I have most hated! Love your enemies is the gospel precept. Where is the Christian that makes haste to heap honours on his enemy? Have pity then on wretched Haman if his heart-strings crack and break as he strives to do the king's bidding. Oh! to be emptied of self-seeking, to lie low at the foot of the cross! it will save us from many a hard knock. Stoop low if thou wouldst not be hurt. Think not too much of thyself.

V. The humiliating condition of conceit. The most humiliating condition in which Haman was placed was, not when he hung on the gallows, but when he marched through the streets of the city by the side of Mordecai, and proclaimed before him. Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour. The righteous one is now exalted, the wicked one is debased. The city may well rejoice. The truth, like Mordecai, may lie long neglected; falsehood, like Haman, may ride in triumph. But the condition must be reversed. Truth will be lifted out of its degradation, clothed in its royal apparel, and even falsehood will be compelled to minister to the honour of the truth and proclaim its glories. Also the time must come when Jesus will ride forth in royal apparel, and his enemies will join in the proclamation—This is the man whom the universe delights to honour. Seek to be the friends of King Jesus now, and then in the day of his glorious appearing we shall not be numbered among those humiliated by his triumph.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 6, 11.

Of all troubles the trouble of a proud heart is the greatest. It was a great trouble to Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, which another man would not have thought so; the moving of a straw is troublesome to proud flesh. First or last, self-denial and victory over ourselves is absolutely necessary; otherwise faith, which is a grace that requireth self-denial, will never be brought into the soul and bear rule there.—*Sibbes*.

Self-conceit, obstinacy, and selfishness are three shameful and harmful evils that have plunged many into ruin. Worldly persons seek their highest good in external pomp and appearance. Self-love appropriates all things to itself, and concedes nothing to its neighbour. Men seek perishable honour; would that they strove diligently after the imperishable honour and glory of heaven! The manner of wicked advisers is, when the haughty fare too well, to goad them on to vindictiveness; but if something unforeseen checks them they drive them to despair. God is the same always; He can bring it about that neither earth nor hell can prevail against us. The wicked are nearest destruction

when they deem themselves farthest from it.—*Sturke*.

Ambition (as they say of the crocodile) groweth as long as it liveth; and self-love, like to a good stomach, draws to itself what nourishment it liketh, and casts off that which offends it. It maketh men unreasonable, and teacheth them to turn the glass to see themselves bigger, others lesser, than they are. Herodotus reporteth, that after the Greeks had got the better of Xerxes and his Persians, and came together to divide the spoil, when it was put to the question who of all the commanders had deserved the best reward, none would yield to other, but every man thought himself best deserving and second to none. In the battle of Edgrade, where Mahomet, the great Turk, was beaten and driven out of the field, Capistranus and Huniades were the chieftains there, and whereas both of them wrote the relation of that day's work, neither of them so much as once mentioned the other, but each one took the whole praise of it to himself. Haman, though altogether unworthy of the least respect, yet holds himself best worthy of the

greatest honours, and therefore will be sure to be no niggard in advising those ceremonies of honour which he presumes meant to his own person. — *Trapp.*

Ambition may rear turrets in emulation of heaven, and vainglory build castles in the air, but they should have no roof, as the latter should have no foundation. Philip threatened the Lacedemonians, that as he entered their country he would utterly extinguish them. They wrote him no other answer but *si* (if); meaning, it was a condition well put in, for he was never like to come there. — *Adams.*

Four distinct services did Haman render Mordecai. First, he was his hair-dresser, for he shaved and anointed him; secondly, he was his valet, for he attended him in the bath; thirdly, he was his footman, for he led the horse Mordecai rode; fourthly, he was his trumpeter, for he proclaimed before him: Thus shall be done to the man whom the king desireth to honour. — *Talmud.*

To thyself be it, Haman! Albeit what may please thyself may hardly be so agreeable to another. Pity for the "most noble prince"—and Haman may have had some one in view whom he wished to have laid at his feet—who should be appointed to execute what thou shouldst prescribe as the king's commandment! There was no honour and distinction high enough for himself, and no service too menial which he would not have done to him by another. "The royal apparel," by which was meant the gorgeous outward garment of the king, which, according to Persian law, it was a capital crime to wear without his consent—the horse which the king was accustomed to "ride upon," well known both by its excellency and its peculiar trappings and ornaments,—"the crown royal," probably such a lofty tiara as an Oriental writer has described, "entirely composed of thickly set diamonds, pearls, rubies, and emeralds, so exquisitely disposed as to form a mixture of the most beautiful colours in the brilliant light reflected from its surface,"—were to be brought, and "one of the king's

most noble princes" was to act the part of his servant, arraying him in his robe, setting the crown upon his head, and when he was mounted, to go—reins in hand—through the city proclaiming before him—"Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

The intense vanity and parade of Haman's advice to the king may move our contempt, but we must remember that he was choosing for *himself*. There are many others who, if they were only to put their wishes into words, would ask for things quite as foolish, and absurd. In every case they would reveal the ruling passion of their hearts, and if it proved to be worldly or sensual, what was desired in large measure would only, if granted, mature it and injure the receiver. Sometimes there are secret murmurings that God does not leave every man to choose his own portion, but if we only knew our own dispositions better, and the evil principles within us which require to be checked and overcome, we should have much greater reason for gratitude that God retains our earthly portion in his own care and allotment. Especially when we take into account our discipline and preparation for eternity, would we be the very worst to advise regarding what would be best for us. A Haman would choose what would minister to his pride, a Demas to his worldliness, another and another to even baser lusts, and the soul would be left, like a temple in ruins, more and more desolate, and infested, in an ever-increasing degree, with what was vile and loathsome. For the sake of our present peace and future hope, we should rejoice rather in the choice of God—"Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

When a scheming self-seeking worldling is brought to poverty and punishment, sympathy for him is apt to spring up in some breasts. They put the man in the foreground, and by his miserable plight are moved to commiseration and pity. But what of those whom it was in his heart to have ruined? The widows and children whose gains he would have

greedily grasped and used for his own selfish ends? The bed which he would make for others is surely good enough for him to lie upon. Simply to change places with his intended victims is a merciful dealing in providence, in so far as it is calculated to convince of personal wrong-doing, and to bring to repentance if the man has not placed himself beyond it. Haman had this justice meted out to him. He would have demeaned one of "the king's most noble princes," by making him his valet and public proclaimer of his own praise through the streets of Shushan. His selfishness blinded him to the suffering and mortification which the procedure would inflict upon another. But ah! what a revulsion of feeling must he have experienced when he was commanded by the king to change places with that other; to become himself the menial slave, putting on him the royal robe and crown; and whilst he rides on the king's horse, compelled himself to walk at its head and sound the other's praise. The greatest grief was that the man who was declared worthy to take the place which he had portrayed for himself was "Mordecai the Jew,"—the man who had refused him homage at the king's gate was to receive homage from himself in the public thoroughfares; and the same for whom he had provided a gallows was to have a crown put upon his head by his own hands. It was pitiful. And as we now see him executing the king's order, which he knew it would be in vain to oppose, commiseration and pity for him are liable to bias our judgment. How downcast and forlorn he must have looked. How the words of the proclamation must have gulped in his throat. How he must have hung down his head and averted the astonished looks of the people. Still, he had only changed places with "the most noble prince," whom he would have callously subjected to the same ordeal. For selfishness to reap what it had sown for another is not by any means an unequal punishment. It may be severe, but not more so than this intense selfishness would have accounted nothing if prescribed for an equal. Oh, no, we cannot even compassionate thee, Haman!

If it had been thyself who had been robed and crowned, and royally conducted through the streets riding on the king's horse, thou wouldest have made sure that Mordecai had been hanged on the gallows, and one of "the king's most noble princes" would have been degraded to minister to thy pride and selfishness. —*McEwan*.

This is a great infelicity which attends worldly pursuits, that there is no proportion between the pleasure of success and the pain of disappointment. How unsatisfactory to Haman would the wearing of royal ornaments for a small part of a day have been, and all the other honours which he expected to enjoy only for a few moments! We can scarcely suppose that the pleasure of this feast to his vanity would have lasted longer than a night, or a week. But how dreadful a stroke was given to him, by hearing that the man whom he mortally hated was the man whom the king delighted to honour; that he was to be invested with that royal pomp to which Haman himself looked, as the perfection of felicity, and that he must become the servant of that man for whom he had erected a gallows fifty cubits high! What exquisite misery, if he had lived to endure it, must have been his portion, at the galling remembrance of his own disgrace, when the erection of that lofty gibbet published to the whole city the height of his hopes and the bitterness of his disappointment!

"Let nothing fail," said the king, "of all that thou hast spoken."—He counted no honours too great for his beneficiary. He would compensate by his liberality the time which Mordecai had lived unrewarded and unhonoured. If we have neglected to do good when we should have done it, let us use double diligence in doing it, at least whilst time is still left us to repair our omissions.

Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. Do you complain that you must deny yourselves, and take up your cross in

following Christ? But who is the man that is exempted from trouble, or the man that does not find it necessary to deny himself on many occasions? And is it not better to deny ourselves for Christ than to deny ourselves for the sake of any earthly object? You see that Haman, great as he was in the court of Ahasuerus, must serve Mordecai as his lacquey, and perform to him those services which to Haman himself appeared the most glorious of all others, when he would have given thousands of gold and silver for a warrant to slay him. The greatest earthly princes must often do things displeasing, or omit things pleasing, to themselves for temporary advantage, or even without the prospect of advantage. What could Haman gain from Mordecai, or from Ahasuerus, for doing what he could not do without the most extreme reluctance? But the least instance of self-denial for the sake of Christ shall be attended with a great reward, worthy of the bounty of the Giver.

Mordecai was too wise to value those childish honours which appeared so glorious to Haman. He was, undoubtedly, struck with amazement when Haman brought to him the royal robes and the royal horse. But it was necessary for him to yield obedience to the king's pleasure; and doubtless he saw the gracious hand of God in what was done to him. Mordecai had more sagacity than the friends of Haman, who saw the fall of Haman before Mordecai the Jew, presaged by this instance of his humiliation. Jacob saw the love of God in the face of his reconciled enemy. Mordecai saw the favour of God in the reluctant services performed by an enemy as full of malice as ever, and was cheered by the dawns of that deliverance to his nation for which he had been praying and looking.—*Larson*.

As I have said in a former lecture, I am reluctant to offer any conjecture of my own on a subject on which so many learned men have bestowed their labour; but it does seem to me that this proposal of Haman's has a meaning which has not been commonly observed. Acquainted as he was with the dangerous

and slippery tenure of a favourite in an Eastern court, what possible object could he have in wishing to be allowed, for one brief hour, to act the king, arrayed in his master's robes of state, with the crown of Persia on his head, and paraded through the streets of the city upon the royal horse? And this strange fancy becomes stranger still when we remember that these honours were accounted so divine and sacred by the Persians, that to assume an imitation of any one of them, without the king's express command, would have been an offence to be expiated by instant death.

The true explanation of Haman's proposal appears to me to be this: that he really was aspiring to the sovereignty of Persia, and was meditating an attempt on his master's throne. His wealth was incalculable, and his power was already all but boundless and supreme. All, it appears, that was wanting to his happiness was, that he should be decked in the external badges and symbols of royalty:—a very unlikely wish for any man to entertain who did not aspire to royalty itself. In those countries the steps from a throne to a dungeon were often but few, and the transfer of the crown from the prince to one of his nobles or favourites was sometimes but the work of a few hours. Nor is it at all improbable, that the incredible presumption and conceit of this vainglorious man may so far have misconstrued the extraordinary favours which Esther was now showering upon him, as to lead him to imagine that the queen herself would not regret the change. Self-admirers are generally self-deceivers. If these suppositions are just they will throw considerable light both on Haman's answer and on what soon after followed.

But, whatever were his motives, it is almost impossible to conceive the horror and amazement he must have felt at the king's reply. If the ground had opened under his feet he could scarcely have been more dismayed than when the clear and awful tones of that voice, which few ever heard without trembling, issued from the sanctuary in which the great king sat enshrined, and the wretched man listened to those memorable words

which rung out the knell of his ambition. "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." "Mordecai the Jew"—"That sitteth at the king's gate"—"As thou hast said."—It was agony. It was madness. Every syllable left a poisoned arrow rankling in his heart. But he heard and obeyed without a murmur: wonderful illustration of the self-command which a man of such passions could assume, as well as of the abject submission by which he had won the favour of his master.

But who can form any conception of the tortures Haman must have endured while executing such an order? With what bitter reproaches must he have loaded himself for having given such advice, without first taking the precaution to ask the name of the person whom the king designed to honour. Never was folly more fitly punished. That he, Haman, should be obliged to single out, from among the crowd of wondering courtiers, the object of his loathing and abhorrence for this unparalleled honour and distinction; that, publicly, and before the eyes of so many who, he well knew, would exult over his humiliation, he should be compelled, with his own hands, to adorn the detested Jew in all the glories of that royal splendour which he coveted for himself; that he should be forced to wait as a lacquey at his horse's rein, and amid the sneers of multitudes, who were perfectly aware how much he hated Mordecai, and with what scorn Mordecai had defied him, to proclaim with his own lips that this was the man whom the king delighted to honour; and as he walked along, while thousands bowed down and prostrated themselves—not to him, but to Mordecai—to know that he himself was the contriver, and adviser, and doer of the whole of this odious pageant,—this was a punishment so exquisite, so just, so utterly beyond the power of man to have concocted, that it was scarcely possible for any one to avoid seeing in it the hand of Providence and the forewarning of a coming fate.—*Crothwaite*.

There is an increscent power in evil (as indeed there is also in good), in view of which we cannot be too watchful and anxious, lest by any means we should fall under the power of it. The power of it, remember, is very silent and gentle generally in its operations. The use of strong metaphors to signify the growth of evil is apt to mislead and deceive us; and the contemplation of very strong human instances like this of Haman is apt enough to have the same effect. The growth of evil—Do not figure it by the waters of Niagara hurrying down the rapids and plunging over the brink in ocean fulness. Take rather a plant or slender tree in your garden, which has just begun to grow: there it stands in the morning sunlight; there it stands in the evening dew. It never travels, never plunges, never roars. *It is growing*—and that is enough. So do not look at Haman reeling on the giddy eminence he is trying to scale, and falling thence, as Satan did from heaven. But look at a man growing up in perfect quietness, who has no care to grow up in real goodness, no fear of growing up in evil—and there you have the picture which would be to us, if we could see things as they are, as alarming as any other. Anything may come out of that—Haman, Ahitophel, Judas Iscariot.

Here is the strength, and here is the fitness of the Gospel, and here its inestimable preciousness—that it goes to the root of all evil in man. It is a regeneration, a renewing, a quickening, a redemption; when it comes in power it is death to the principle of evil within—considered as the reigning power of the life. "We are crucified with Christ;" and with Christ we attain to "the resurrection of the dead." O happy change that puts us for ever on the winning side, that gives us the pledge and assurance of eternal victory by the attainment of eternal goodness. Is it wonderful that we should exhort sinful men to flee to him, and to trust him to the uttermost? In him we are in the undecaying strength—in the perfect purity—in the infinite love—and therefore in the eternal blessedness.—*Dr. Ruleigh*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 12—14.

A SMALL MAN IN ADVERSITY.

MEN are to be judged so as to form an estimate of their greatness or their littleness, not by their surroundings, but by the manner in which they conduct themselves in the trying changes, in the ups and downs, of life. We must consider their conduct. "By their fruits shall ye know them." Does a man carry himself with calmness in prosperity and with fortitude in adversity, then we may pronounce him great. Is a man unduly elated by prosperity and broken-hearted by adversity, then we pronounce him a small man. Tried thus the despised Mordecai is the truly great man, and the haughty Haman is the little man. In one sense we are the creatures of circumstances. We cannot help being more or less affected by them. In another sense we ought to be the masters of circumstances. They must not be permitted to unman our natures. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider. Adversity so acts upon some people that all power of consideration is removed. Oh, to be masters of ourselves! This can only be done by the help of Divine grace. "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me."

I. A great man in prosperity. Are there no great men that meet with no prosperity, as the world accounts prosperity? Has God no hidden heroes in quiet walks? We may believe that he has. Up to this time Mordecai had been a great man in obscurity. Really Mordecai was no greater when riding on the king's horse in triumphal procession through the city than when sitting at the king's gate. We are slow to learn and believe the truth, that not circumstances, but character makes a man great. Mordecai's mind was so great that he rose above the state of things and men. He dwelt in a higher sphere than that formed by the pomp of circumstances, by the parade of royalty. We can imagine Mordecai with calm majesty riding through the city Susa. He took the thing naturally; he penetrated to the heart of things. When the little show was over he went calmly to his obscure place at the city gate. In some degree he is a type of him who rode forth amid the hosannas of the multitude, and then listened, as one not astonished, to the cry, Crucify him, crucify him. A great soul had Mordecai. He had food to eat of which Haman had no conception. Seek high conceptions of duty. Sit at thy post, even at the city gate, and wait only for the opening of heaven's gate.

II. A small man in adversity. Oh, when adversity really comes are we not all small men? The Bechuanas sit and talk as if they felt nothing when undergoing a painful surgical operation. But most men wince beneath the sharp knife of adversity. Most are but bruised reeds when the blasts of sorrow blow keenly and sharply, and they give forth dismal wailings. Therefore we must temper our judgment with much mercy as we consider Haman in adversity. "Our grief is but our grandeur in disguise;" but our grief also tells of our littleness. Most are brothers to Haman in the time of their adversity. The dreaded blow of trouble sends them to their houses mourning. Adversity makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. How many despise the guilty Haman, and yet are by trouble reduced to his miserable level. Haman was a small man. He was fretting like a little child because the coveted toy had been grasped out of his hand. For we do not suppose that Haman as yet knew that this honour rendered to Mordecai was but the beginning of his own awful end. So far Haman's troubles were in great measure of an ideal character. A great many of our troubles are of this character. But ideal troubles cause us real misery. If we could only act out the lesson, man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long, we should not have many troubles. Small are most men in the nature of their desires and their disappoint-

ments. They strive and fight for childish toys, and when they get them they are not satisfied, and ask for more. When these toys are wrested from them they haste to their houses mourning, and have their heads covered for grief.

III. A small man in adversity seeks for counsellors. He went to his wife and his friends. Where should a man go in the time of trouble if not to his wife and his friends? A good wife should be a help-meet. Like the ivy plant, she should cling the faster the greater the ruin, and be a helping support and a graceful ornament even to that ruin. Where can a man in sorrow go if not to his friends? where Haman little thought of going. Friends are not always glad to see humiliated Hamans. Even the wife may turn round upon the husband and say, Curse God and die. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

IV. A man in adversity obtains poor consolation. One thing is certain, Haman's wife and his friends told him the truth now, but they had not told him the truth *before*. They had not warned him of his danger, nor showed him the way out of his difficulty. Even now they have nothing in the way of really helpful advice to offer. They simply predict his further downfall. Friends too often have the fatal capacity of plunging a drowning man deeper into the water. Very sad sometimes is the errand on which the man goes when he consults his friends as to the best thing to be done in his trial. He comes back a sadder, but not always a wiser, man from the visit. They glibly show him his faults; they tell him where he has made a slip; they too often appear as if they were taking pleasure in making him look contemptible. We compassionate Haman from the bottom of our hearts. He has sown the wind, and is now reaping the whirlwind. He is now deserted by all, left to his own bitter fate. Heaven's consolations even then might have been obtained. Rich are the consolations that Jesus brings. He never upbraids on account of our faults. If he does not deliver us from our distresses, he gives us strength that we may bear them manfully.

V. A man in adversity receives an ominous summons. And while they were yet talking with him came the king's chamberlains. Trouble upon trouble; but Haman did not understand the worst. He did not foresee the future. He little dreamt that Esther's banquet was but the way to the gallows. We sometimes say, If I had only known! Well, we all know, or might know, that wrong-doing will lead to trouble, and yet we go on doing wrong things. Had Haman known, perhaps, like too many, he would simply have done another wrong thing to prevent the mischief likely to come from past wrong-doing. No need for prophetic sight. We know that sin worketh death; let us then forsake all evil. From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord, deliver us.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—14.

In prosperity he is highly insolent and cruel, but in adversity he is so broken and dejected that he knows not which way to turn. But his counsellors are no better off than himself. His friends do not console him, nor show him any plan for escaping his danger, which nevertheless was then the most needful help for Haman; but they throw him, just hesitating between hope and fear, into despair. "Thou wilt surely fall in his sight," say they. Had they admonished him indeed of his many

and heinous sins toward God and his servants, of his duty of recognizing the inevitable judgment of God, of repentance, of reconciliation, then perchance it may have turned out better with him. The power and efficacy of truth is so great that even its enemies and all the ungodly bear testimony to it. So the magicians of Pharaoh are compelled to explain, This is the finger of God; and the Egyptians' cry, Let us flee before Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them.—*Feuerdent.*

Men find no difference in themselves. The face of a Jew looks so like other men's that Esther and Mordecai were not, for long, taken for what they were. He that made them makes the distinction betwixt them; so as a Jew may fall before a Persian and get up and prevail; but if a Persian, or whosoever of the Gentiles, begin to fall before a Jew he can neither stay nor rise. There is an invisible hand of omnipotency that strikes in from his own and confounds their opposites. O God, neither is thy hand shortened, nor thy bowels straitened in thee: thou art still and ever thyself. If we be thy true spiritual Israel, neither earth nor hell shall prevail against us; we shall either stand sure or surely rise, while our enemies shall lick the dust.—*Bishop Hall.*

The chief reason why the enemies of the Church gnash their teeth at the sight of God's gracious dealings is, that they take the rising of the Church to be a presage of their ruin: a lesson which Haman's wife had learned.

Haman's wife had learned this, that if her husband began once to fall before the Jews he should surely fall. Wicked men have an hour, and they will be sure to take it; and God hath his hour too, and will be as sure to take that. The judgments of the wicked are mercies to the Church. So saith David, "He slew mighty kings, Og, king of Bashan, for his mercy endureth for ever."—*Sibbes.*

In the narrative which follows we have an example of that decency and propriety with respect to circumstances which is always observed in Scripture, and which may be traced in what is omitted as well as what is introduced. Nothing is said of what passed between Mordecai and Haman, either at the beginning or close of the ceremony. The inspired writer gives us no account of the acclamations of the multitude whom the spectacle drew together. They would no doubt act, poor souls, as they are always accustomed to do, hail the favourite of the day, and echo back the voice of the herald. Let them alone—they would have done the same for Haman. We are even left to conjecture what were the thoughts of the judicious few, both

Jews and natives, who might be led by this strange event to augur the approaching fall of the arrogant prime minister, and the rising fortunes of the object of his hatred. The sacred narrative passes over these things, and hastens to the crisis.

The pageant is now over, and we see, issuing from the dispersing crowd, the two principal persons, moving in different directions, and in opposite moods of mind.

Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. There is a double portrait drawn with one stroke, but it is by the hand of a master! We see the hearts of the two men depicted in their looks and gait;—the composure and humility of the one, and the confusion and bitter mortification of the other. These two lines give us a deeper insight into the characters of the men than a would-be painter could have conveyed by the most elaborate representation.

Mordecai came again to the king's gate. He did not remain to prolong his triumph, and to drink in the incense offered by the crowd. He did not go to his own house, and gather together his friends and countrymen to tell them of his high honours, and to receive their congratulations. He did not hurry back to the palace in expectation of receiving some more substantial mark of the royal favour. He did not seek an audience of the king to bring an accusation against his mortal enemy. But he came again to the king's gate from which he had been taken, and resumed his former place as a servant. He was not elated—he was not even discomposed by his honours. "*He stood not up, nor moved,*" for all that Haman had done to him.

"If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee" (saith the wise man), "leave not thy place." But it is still more difficult to keep our place when we are visited with the favour of the ruler. Few can bear honours and dignities with equanimity, even when they come upon them gradually; but such sudden and high advancement was enough to make any ordinary person

giddy, to cause him to forget himself, and behave unseemly. What fatal effects upon the head and heart do we often witness in persons who have all at once been raised from poverty to riches and rank. Even good men are not always proof against the intoxicating influence of such transitions. How incoherently did the disciples talk on the Mount of Transfiguration! That vessel needs to be well ballasted, which, after being long becalmed, has all its sails at once filled with a favourable gust of wind.

But Mordecai kept his place; like a gallant ship, firmly moored in a bay, which during a flood-tide heaves, and seems for a time borne along with the lighter craft, but, obeying its anchor, comes round and resumes its former position. The pageantry of an hour could not unsettle his mind; he regarded it in its true light—a vain show. Had he had a choice, he would have declined it; as it was, he suffered rather than enjoyed it. It may be difficult to determine which of the two felt most awkward and constrained—Haman in conferring or Mordecai in receiving the extravagant honours. Not that the latter was insensible or a stranger to feeling on the occasion. But then he viewed it, not as a prelude to his own aggrandizement, but as an earnest of the deliverance of his people; and as his confidence of this event rested on surer grounds than his own advancement or the influence of his daughter, his heart was filled with astonishment and with gratitude at the prospect; he possessed his soul in patience—he stood still, and waited for the salvation of God.

But let us now turn to Haman. He had not confidence to return to the palace to present the request for which he had visited it in the morning. Nor could he endure the sight of the people, before whom he felt himself dishonoured. But he *“hasted to his house mourning, and with his head covered.”* Had Haman been a man of virtue and true dignity of mind, this occurrence could not have disturbed his peace, far less broken his heart. “Why? what harm has it done to me? I have been se-

lected as *‘one of the king’s most noble princes,’* to do this temporary honour to a man who saved the royal life.” At most he would have regarded it as one of those freaks which fortune delights to play in arbitrary courts, and which break the dull monotony of a palace. He would have said, “I have seen servants riding upon horses, and princes, like servants, walking on the earth.” But the man who could complain that all his wealth and honours “availed him nothing, so long as he saw Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate,” could not fail to be stung to the quick by the recent transaction. Hatred, and disappointment, and mortified pride, rankled in his breast, and, to torment him still more, awakened remorse for the past, and fearful forebodings of the future. Surely such a sight is sufficient to cure those who have been smitten with pride or with envy at worldly greatness.—*McCrrie.*

Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. Who were these wise men? Either sages whom Haman patronized, and from whom he expected wise counsel when he required it, or diviners, who were believed to know more than men could know, without some communication with superior beings. Many of the heathens put much confidence in diviners, but we have learned better things from the word of God. By making it our counsellor at all times of perplexity we shall find peace to our souls.*

“If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall.”—If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews. Why do they lay so much stress upon the stock from which Mordecai sprung? If Mordecai had been a native Persian, or a Babylonian, or an Egyptian, would they not have prognosticated equal success to him against Haman? No; it plainly appears that the dispensations of Divine

* Isa. viii. 19, 20; Psal. cxix. 24.

Providence in favour of the Jews were so far known to them as to assure them that Providence watched over their interests in a manner peculiar to their nation. Although most men are disposed to think that their own country is happy above others in the Divine favour, and although the Persians at this time seemed to have good reason to flatter themselves with a special interest in the favour of Heaven, yet these wise Persians plainly confessed, that the Jews scattered through the nations were the special objects of the Divine care. The wonders done in Babylon were known to all the world, and could not fail to impress all confederate princes with high sentiments concerning the God of Israel. Haman's wise men might have read the sacred books of the Jews, in which they would find that their God had wrought as great wonders for them in times past as in the period of the Babylonian captivity. They learned instruction from the works of God. They saw that the same God who had preserved Daniel and his companions watched over the safety and fortune of Mordecai, and they concluded that Haman, his irreconcilable enemy, would fall under the weight of his vengeance.

But it is strange that these wise men, and even the wife of Haman, whatever they thought, expressed to him their mind so fully. If they did not choose to flatter him, might they not at least have concealed their dismal conjectures, especially as he was led by their counsels to that public disgrace in which he had involved himself, by building a gallows for the man who was appointed to be the king's favourite? for although it was built in the court of his own house, yet the news of its erection was soon to spread. It appears from the freedom they used with Haman, that they already considered him as a lost man, whom it was useless to flatter. They were his friends, as long as his friendship could profit them, and now they seem to have cared little whether he accounted them as his friends or his enemies. Their prophecy must have been as unpleasant as the howling of a dog, or even a sentence of death, to his ears. The rich

hath many friends; but when poverty is seen coming like an armed man, they vanish away like snow in the days of sunshine.

We may, however, learn useful instruction from a prophecy dictated by reflection on the works of the Lord. Blind heathens have been forced to see that God takes care of his people, that he often interposes wonderfully for their deliverance, and that he leaves not his gracious works in their behalf unfinished. Why do not God's own people, in the day of their distress, call to remembrance his judgments for their consolation and the support of their faith? When he begins to deliver them, why do they indulge distrusting fears about the accomplishment of that work which he hath taken into his own hand? Why are they not thankful for the day of small things, as the beginnings of months of joy? After Jesus undertook to heal the daughter of Jairus strong temptations met the mourning parent, when Jesus was on the road to complete his work, and fears began to overwhelm his soul. But what said Jesus? "Fear not, only believe." He believed, and received his daughter back from death. —*Lawson*.

Still, although we may despise the wife and the friends, we cannot say that by their counsel now they do Haman any injustice. They do *not* render him the highest service. The highest service would be to tell him the truth, and help him to conform to it by confession, repentance, and amendment. (If they had been even worldly wise they would have told him at once to take down the gallows.) But they do him no injustice. The poor man (for now pity begins to rise) has been sowing diligently, and he is now to reap *as* he has sown. Black harvest comes in a day. It begins to come in his own house. There—where he had plotted the mischief, begins to fall the shadow of doom.

Yet, let us not overdraw the picture; possibly, if we knew all, there are softer lines to put into it, and some lights of human kindness. There is always much untold and unknown in these histories. Did they follow up their confident pre-

diction that he could not succeed against Mordecai and the Jews, by earnest friendly counsel to Haman to conceal himself, or at once to take flight out of the empire, or away to some distant part of it? We know not. We know only that they were still talking with him—talking over the whole matter—the gathering dangers, the possible methods of relief—when the conference is interrupted by the entrance of the king's chamberlains, who have come, in haste, to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had again prepared.—*Dr. Raleigh.*

When Haman's wife heard her husband say that Mordecai was against him, because he was an Israelite, she said that her husband should take the foil, and Mordecai should prevail. What if she had heard her husband say that the Lord of Mordecai was against him? If the servant be so terrible, who dare encounter with his master?—*H. Smith's Sermons.*

And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. Was there ever a nobler man than this? You will find ten Christians who bear well the trial of adversity for one who can bear well the sharper trial of prosperity. Mordecai, returned to his place, was wearing fairer robes than the king's—that vesture of humility wherein the Son of God walked on earth, and which he has ordained as the livery of his redeemed. Go tell him that he has now a splendid opportunity to rise in the world, that his foot is on the ladder, and he needs but to climb; and he will tell of another ladder he is climbing, with angels for his helpers, and that the show this morning had almost cast him down. His duty is at the king's gate, and there he will wait upon God to show him the end of this strange thing.

“The dew that never wets the flinty mountain

Falls on the valley free;

Bright verdure fringes the small desert fountain,

But barren sand the sea.

The white-robed saints the throne-steps singing under,

Their state all meekly wear,

Their pauseless praise wells up from hearts that wonder

That ever they came there.”

But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered. The change was swift and ominous since morning, when he had seen to the gallows being ready, and gone forth hopeful. Not a man in all the city knew that two hours hence others would cover his face and lead him out to death; but Haman felt that God was fighting against him, and anticipated his doom. Is it wrong to mock him now? Why not report yourself to the king as having done his bidding, and ask what you purposed to ask this morning? On the showing of your own words, the king has treated you as “one of his most noble princes.” Zeresh and your friends are expecting you to bring back your victim with you for the gallows. Why so downcast? But, despicable as Haman is, pity is fitter for us than scorn—pity, with a prayer for ourselves that we may escape the fatal madness of making self our god. Haman's friends had helped him last night, and roused him to hope; but they failed him now. These were summer friends, and thought it not worth while even to lie to him any longer. Besides, they were superstitious. “If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews.” Why this emphasis on Mordecai's race? The ease would not have been so bad if he had been an Ethiopian; but there were strange features about these Jews. They sometimes stood out on ground of high principle, and when they did so they prospered against all probability. The friends of Haman were Amalekites, in all likelihood, and familiar, therefore, with a history of warning. “Before whom thou hast begun to fall.” His friends see no hope for Haman now that he is started on the swift incline of ruin. When great men of this sort begin to go down their course is quick in proportion to their greatness; and it is a serious aggravation of their misery that the friends of their prosperity hasten their unpitied fall. The tempters, in this world or the next, prove the tormentors.—*Symington.*

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1. *Safe sleeping.* When one asked Alexander how he could sleep so soundly and securely in the midst of danger, he told him that Parmenio watched; he might well sleep when Parmenio watched. Oh how securely may they sleep over whom he watches that never slumbers nor sleeps! "I will," said David, "lay me down and sleep, for thou, Lord, makest me to dwell in safety."—*Venning.*

A sleepless night. "Because God wouldn't let him," was the answer given by a little boy in one of our Sunday Schools of a large city in the West of England to a question asked by the teacher in reference to the Persian monarch not being able to enjoy his accustomed slumbers. It was a simple but sound reply, for God's providence was watching over his ancient people, and when they appeared to be in imminent danger of falling by the hand or the sword he again proved faithful to his promises, and made transpiring events and circumstances subservient to his purpose. On that night the king could not sleep because

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

Biblical Museum.

A sleepless night. A few years ago, a pious man at Gravesend had retired to rest late on the Saturday night, having first secured the doors and windows of his house and shop. Weary, however, as he was with the labours of the week, he found it impossible to sleep; and, having tossed about in his bed for an hour or two without rest, he resolved to rise and spend an hour in the perusal of his Bible, as preparatory to the engagements of the Sabbath. He went downstairs with the Bible under his arm, and advancing towards one of the outer doors, he found several men who had broken into the house, and who but for this singular interruption would probably, in a very short period, have deprived him of the whole of his property. —*R. T. S. Anee, quoted in Biblical Museum.*

Providence of God in withholding sleep.—The late Sir Evan Nepean, when Under-Secretary of State, related to a friend of his that one night he had the most unaccountable wakefulness that could be imagined. He was in perfect health, had dined early and moderately, had no care—nothing to brood over—and was perfectly self-possessed. Still he could not sleep, and from eleven till two in the morning had never closed an eye. It was summer, and twilight had far advanced; and to dissipate the ennui of his wakefulness, he resolved to rise and breathe the morning air in the park. There he saw nothing but sleepy sentinels, whom he rather envied. He passed the Home Office several times, and at last, without any particular object, resolved to let himself in with his pass key. The book of entries of the day before lay open on the table, and in sheer listlessness he began to read. The

first thing appalled him!—"A reprieve to be sent to York for the coiners ordered for execution the next day." It struck him that he had no return to his order to send the reprieve, and he searched the minutes, but could not find it. In alarm, he went to the house of the chief clerk, who lived in Downing Street, knocked him up (it was then long past three), and asked him if he knew anything of the reprieve being sent. In greater alarm, the chief clerk could not remember. "You are scarcely awake," said Sir Evan; "collect yourself: it must have been sent." The chief clerk said he did now recollect he had sent it to the Clerk of the Crown, whose business it was to forward it. "Good!" said Sir Evan; "but have you his receipt and certificate that it is gone?" "No!" "Then come with me to his house. We must find him, though it is so early!" It was now four, and the Clerk of the Crown lived in Chancery Lane. There was no hackney coach, and they almost ran. The Clerk of the Crown had a country house, and meaning to have a long holiday, he was at that moment stepping into his gig, to go to his villa. Astonished at the visit of the Under-Secretary at such an hour, he was still more so at his business. With an exclamation of horror, cried the Clerk of the Crown, "The reprieve is locked up in my desk!" It was brought. Sir Evan sent to the Post Office for the trustiest and fleetest express, and the reprieve reached York at the moment the unhappy people were ascending the cart. Surely this was the finger of God.—*Leisure Hour.*

Ver. 3. Count Zinzendorf owed his religious zeal to the accidental view of a picture of the crucifixion, underneath which was this simple inscription—

"All this for thee, how much for me?"

What honour and dignity hath been done to Jesus? Remember how much he has done for thee, and then ask how much can I do, how much ought I to do, for him?

According to Thieisch Napoleon maintained that a prince who followed his conscience would be a good and noble governor, but not a great man. However, Ahasuerus in this history only appears a truly great man as he manifests some uneasiness and regret on account of his neglect of the great services of Mordecai.

Ver. 5. *Come, a song-bird.* In a lonely cot there sat one night an aged widow, very poor and nearly blind. The Christian lady had been reading from the best of books. "Ah," said the poor widow, "there is one word sweeter than all the rest. It is a song for my darkness. Can you guess what it is?" The visitor thought, and she said presently, "Yes, I think I know; it is Jesus, the name above all other names." "No," said the widow; "Jesus is a blessed word, but that is not enough for me, unless I know him for my Saviour. It is no comfort for me that he died for sinners, unless I know he died for me."

"Perhaps you mean heaven," said the visitor, "for he is there." "No," said the widow; "what comfort would it be for me to know that Jesus is in heaven, and others should see his face, and love and serve him there, if I am not bound for heaven. No; it is just one word from his own lips, I call it my little song-bird—come." Jesus says *come* in a far different sense from that in which Ahasuerus said, Let him come in. Ahasuerus said this for his own enlightenment. Jesus says "Come unto me" for our enrichment.

Royal presents to an official.—The presentation as a gift from a royal personage of that which had been worn on his own person was a special mark of favour and condescension. Morier, in his narrative of "A Second Journey through Persia," thus illustrates this custom:—"When a treaty between Russia and Persia was concluded, some years since, in the commencement, according to the usual form, the ranks of the two principal persons who were deputed to arrange it had to be specified. The Russian general was found to have more titles than the Persian plenipotentiary, who was therefore at a loss how to make himself appear of equal importance with the other negotiator; but at length, recollecting that, previous to his departure for the place of conference, his sovereign had honoured him by a present of one of his own swords, and of a dagger set with precious stones, to wear which is a peculiar distinction in Persia, and besides had clothed him with one of his own shawl robes, a distinction of still greater value, he therefore designated himself as 'endowed with the special gifts of the monarch, lord of the dagger set in jewels, of the sword adorned with gems, and of the shawl coat already worn.'"

Ver. 12. *Fortitude of the Bechuanas.* They are excellent patients. There is no wincing; everything prescribed is done instantaneously. Their only failing is that they become tired of a long course. But in any operation even the women sit unmoved. I have been quite astonished again and again at their calmness. In cutting out a tumour, an inch in diameter, they sit and talk as if they felt nothing. "A man like me never cries," they say; "they are children that cry." And it is a fact that the men never cry. They stand in striking contrast to Haman, who hastened to his house mourning for what was

an imaginary evil in great measure; yea, they reprove a great many who profess to be sustained by higher motives. It may be a want of sensitiveness on the part of the Bechuanas, but with increased sensitiveness there should be an increased power of self-control. It is wonderful what power of self-control is possessed and manifested by the members of the Society of Friends.—*Dr. Blaikie's Personal Life of David Livingstone, LL.D.*

Satan, a hard task-master. There was a man in the town where I was born who used to steal all his firewood. He would get up on cold nights, and go and take it from his neighbours' wood-piles. A computation was made, and it was ascertained that he had spent more time, and worked harder, to get his fuel than he would have been obliged to do if he had earned it in an honest way, and at ordinary wages. And this thief was a type of thousands of men who work a great deal harder to please the devil than they would have to work to please God.—*Beecher.*

So Haman worked hard to please the devil of an evil nature, and it ended in mourning. He would have found more satisfaction in the long-run if he could have set himself to serve a good nature.

Circumstances. He is happy whose circumstances suit his temper; but he is more excellent who can suit his temper to his circumstances.—*Hume.*

If you can't turn the wind you must turn the mill-sails. Joseph was a beautiful example. See him, in his changed positions, still the upright saint; and Jesus, his conduct at the marriage and in the temple. William Pitt used to be called the minister of existing circumstances. A Christian shepherd, when a gentleman said, to try him, "Suppose your master were to change, or your flock to die; what then?" replied, "Sir, I look upon it that I do not depend upon circumstances, but upon the great God that directs them." The Rev. H. W. Fox, when dying, had constantly upon his lips the words of Baxter:—"Lord, when thou wilt, where thou wilt; as thou wilt." Mordecai, riding in the procession, and then returning to sit at the gate, shows his superiority to mere externals.—*Bowen.*

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 2. The king said again] Compare ch. v. 6. **3. My life, . . . my people]** Esther has had time to carefully prepare her words, and her earnest language rises to the emotionality of poetic parallelisms. We may throw her address into the following form :—

If I have found favour in thine eyes, O king,
And if to the king it seem good,
Let my life be given me at my petition,
And my people at my request.
For we are sold, I and my people,
To be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.

If, now, for slaves and for bondwomen we were sold, I had been silent,
For the enemy is not to be compared with the injury to the king.

4. We are sold] Allusion to Haman's offer to pay into the king's treasury ten thousand talents. **Destroyed, . . . slain, . . . perish]** She quotes the very words of the fearful edict, and thus gives a most telling point and emphasis to her plea. **Although the enemy]** This sentence is obscure, and perhaps Esther meant that it should be ambiguous. The common version conveys the meaning that if the Jews were all sold into slavery, their enemy, who brought this woe upon them, could not, by any payment into the king's treasury, recompense him for the loss he would sustain. But the Hebrew seems to make this last sentence give a reason for Esther's keeping silence; namely, because she does not consider the enemy worthy of the trouble and injury it must cost the king to punish him, and counteract the decree of death that has gone forth against the Jews. **The enemy]** to whom she contemptuously refers is, of course, Haman. **Countervail]** The Kal participial—meaning, to be equal with; to be compared with. **Damage]** may be here taken in the sense of injurious trouble, annoyance, vexation.—*Whedon's Com.* Thus Esther says (ver. 4), The enemy has determined upon the total destruction of my people. If he only intended to bring upon them grievous oppression, even the most grievous oppression of slavery, I would have been silent, for the enemy is not worthy that I should vex or annoy the king by my accusation.—*Keil.* **5. Who is he]** Ahasuerus could not really have doubted; but he affects to doubt, that he may express his anger at the act, apart from all personal considerations.—*Rawlinson.* **Who . . . is he that durst presume]** Lit., as the margin, whose heart has filled him to do this. The evil and ambitious man is filled with foul thoughts and purposes from the corrupt fountain of his own wicked heart. **6.]** Esther replies, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then was Haman afraid before the king and the queen." **7.]** The king went into the palace garden in order to recover from the first burst of anger, and to consider what was to be done with Haman. He stood up and besought Esther to shield him from the king's fury. **8. Haman was fallen upon the bed]** In the wild emotion and alarm of the moment he had thrown himself upon the couch or divan on which Esther reclined at the banquet, and was supplicating for his life. **Will he force the queen]** Of course the king did not believe his own words. But he meant to tax Haman with a further offence in not sufficiently respecting the person of the queen, and he thereby suggested to the attendants his instant execution.—*Rawlinson.* **Covered Haman's face]** The covering of the face was probably the beginning of the execution of the death sentence. (Compare Curtius: They brought Philetas with covered head into the palace.) Even old interpreters remind us of the sentence in Cicero: Lictor, bind his hands, veil his head, hang him on the hapless tree. However, only mentioned here as a Persian custom. **9. Harbonah . . . said]** This cunnich had been many years in Xerxes' service. **Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, &c.]** may not imply that the other servants, or even Harbonah himself, had already brought accusations against Haman, and, in addition, would also reproach him with the erection of this gallows; but, from Harbonah's views, it points out the most appropriate means at hand offered by the prepared gallows for the fate of Haman. This is more significant against Haman. In giving prominence to the fact that Mordecai was the one who spoke well for the king by revealing the plot against the king's life, he intimates that it was more fit for Haman to grace the gallows than the one for whom it was originally erected.—*Lange.* In all the range of literature we find no more signal display of righteous retribution than in the death of Haman.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1—4.

A STRANGE BANQUET.

I. The banquet was strange if we consider the incongruous nature of the company. Things are not what they seem, and the three now meeting together at the banquet are not what they might seem to casual observers. They were not happy, could not be happy under the circumstances. Very different feelings now took possession of their natures. Ahasuerus was now stirred up to a sense of his responsibility. Haman must have felt the approach of his doom. The declaration of the wise men and of his wife must have been ringing in his ears. And Esther was roused up to the fact that an important crisis in her own and in her nation's history was now at hand. A deep sense of uneasiness must have pervaded the company which the wine could not allay. Thus, if we could only pierce the outward we should find that the gatherings of this world are not at all in harmony. Sometimes such gatherings end without any startling revelation; but it was not so in this case. It came to a fatal end for Haman at least. The harmonizing spirit of the gospel of love is the true power by which gatherings may be rendered pleasant and profitable. At the gospel banquet all spirits should harmonize. At the banquet of heaven we may expect complete harmony.

II. The banquet was strange if we consider the unaccustomed constancy of the king. Ahasuerus was evidently a vacillating monarch, to one thing constant never. But now he shows a strange exception. For the third time he asks Queen Esther, "What is thy petition?" The king appears more willing to give than Esther is to ask; and in this he is a type of God. He is indeed more willing to give than the sons of men are to ask. Yea, he gives before we ask; gives in spite of our unwillingness to receive, and of our ingratitude. He is giving every day. Let us be more constant and extensive in our askings. Ahasuerus proves his willingness to give by a repetition of his question. In this he is a small type of the great Giver. He repeats and repeats his assurances of his willingness to give. His invitations and his promises to the children of men are plentifully scattered throughout the sacred records. Ahasuerus showed his willingness to give by a large promise. God shows his willingness to give not only by large promises, but by large bestowals. How many are the bestowals of God! How vast his bounties! What a proof of willingness in the gift of his well-beloved Son!

III. The banquet was strange if we consider the peculiar character of Esther's petition. Notice—(a) *The graceful modesty of the preface.* "If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king." Could anything be more graceful, more modest, and more artistic? Such words from such sweet lips must have confirmed Ahasuerus in his determination to help the speaker in her present difficulty. It is evident that Esther was a woman of skill as well as of beauty. Modesty becomes the petitioner. Beauty is often arrogant. But beauty's charms are increased by the presence of modesty. Morally we have no beauty to plead as we come to God in prayer. Modesty is becoming. Yet boldness is permitted because we come to God in the name of Jesus Christ, who always is well beloved. Let us go to God not pleading our deserts, but the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. (b) *The natural and the benevolent request.* She pleads for her own life, and that was natural. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Wonderful this intense love of life. Wise arrangement of Divine providence. Through trial, and poverty, and pain, and sickness the human being clings to life. Esther might well ask for life with her propitious surroundings. But Esther pleads for *the life of her people, and that was benevolent.* Most probably Esther might have secured the boon of her own life without

securing the salvation of her people. This, however, would not have satisfied her benevolent nature. Haman was very fearful when his own life was threatened. He was very reckless about the lives of others. Esther was calm when her own life was in danger, and was anxious for the salvation of the lives of her people. A sweet type was she of the Son of man, who came to save the lost. He did not even go so far as to plead for his own life. Yea, he gave his life a ransom for many. He pleads for the life of his people. As Esther's, so the Saviour's intercession was successful, and shall be to the end of time. How noble the office to plead for life! Esther pleaded for physical life; Jesus pleads for intellectual and moral life. Not because God has issued a foolish and wicked decree, not because God is a stern tyrant, a luxurious despot, but because the claims of justice must be met, and the interests of God's moral government must be maintained. Esther asked little for herself. She asked for her life, but that was a prelude to the further request of the life of her people. The granting of one part of the petition was a pledge for granting the rest. Jesus only asks to see the fruits of the travail of his soul. He desires the salvation of men. Ahasuerus would be astonished at the nature of Esther's request. God is not astonished at the nature of the Saviour's request. Not like Ahasuerus, God saw the danger, and provided a remedy. Let us believe that God Almighty willeth not the death of a sinner. (c) *The timely confession.* She acknowledges her people. She confesses that she belongs to the persecuted race. The time has come for confession, and she is ready to face the worst. The queen talks of the outcast, despised, and death-decreed race as her people. A period will come when a more wondrous confession than this will be made. Jesus Christ will bring forth his people in the day of final reckoning. Very many poor and despised ones of earth will then be spoken of by Jesus as "My people." Are we now the people of God? Let us not despise any in whom the smallest spark of Divine grace is found. (d) *The startling avowal.* "For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." There is more harm done through want of thought than through want of heart. The thoughtlessness of Ahasuerus caused this declaration to come upon him in a startling manner. Very many people are still sold to destruction through this very thoughtlessness. And too often Esthers are not found to interpose between the thoughtlessness and its bitter consequences. Let us think about our conduct, and especially as to its bearing upon other people. (e) *The gracious consideration.* "But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage." How little consideration for others some people possess! A little personal inconvenience soon sets their tongues working, and they do not shrink from giving much trouble to those about them. Esther would have held her tongue had it been a small thing she was called upon to endure. She shrank from giving the king needless trouble. Let us learn to keep the door of our lips, not for reasons of worldly policy, but because we do not desire to give trouble that can lead to no beneficial results. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O God, my strength and my Redeemer." Thus shall our words be timely. Thus shall our words be profitable to others. Thus our tongues will be silent even in suffering.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—4.

Ahasuerus is not more liberal in his offer than firm in his resolutions, as if his first word had been, like his law, unalterable. I am ashamed to miss that steadiness in Christians which I find in a pagan. It was a great word that he

had said; yet he eats it not, as over lavishly spoken, but doubles and triples it, with hearty assurances of a real prosecution; while those tongues which profess the name of a true God say and unsay at pleasure, recanting their good

purposes, contradicting their own just engagements, upon no cause but their own changeableness.—*Bishop Hall*.

Trembling soul, if this heathen king is so trustworthy in his promises, then your heavenly King is far more faithful. The former promises only to give the half of his kingdom, but he to give you the whole kingdom. Truth may be crushed to the earth, but it dies not; it can be avoided or offended, yet it will finally come to light and triumph.—*Starke*.

But in all this the first notable thing is how far apart stand the judgments of the Almighty and those of this world, since those whom the world esteems most happy and fortunate are truly most unhappy and unfortunate before God. Men, indeed, seeing only what appears, and judging according to the outward semblance, would have boldly pronounced no man more fortunate than Haman. But in fact, and in God's view, who sees the heart, he was of all men the most miserable. For he was inflated with ambition, he was hot with envy, he was bursting with hate, and went to the banquet in the most disturbed state of mind. There rankled in the bottom of his heart the thought of the fresh honour which he had lately been forced to confer upon his enemy; and he was, moreover, goaded to desperation by what his friends had told him to his face—that he himself, having once begun to fall before the Jew, would for ever be his inferior, and that Mordecai would increase in glory and honour.—*Feuillant*.

"Let me make haste away to my country; there are my excellent ancestors, there dwell my noble relations, there is the constant residence of my dearest friends" (*Plotinus*). "Oh, happy will that day be when I shall come into that glorious assembly, when I shall have better company than Homer, Orpheus, Socrates, Cato; when I shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the palace of their Friend and mine! Oh, happy day, when I shall come to my Father's house, to that general assembly, the Church of the first-born, to an innumerable company of angels, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the spirits of just men made perfect!"

(*Tull*). A man's knowledge of other things may add to his fears, and make his miseries greater; but the more knowledge we have of God, the less our fears and sorrows must be; and when our knowledge of God is perfect, all our fears and sorrows shall be for ever blown over. I cannot omit a brave speech of that noble Stoic which comes to my mind: "If the acquaintance and favour of Cæsar can keep you (as you are made to believe) from some fears, how much rather to have God for your Father and Friend? How little cause have such to be afraid at any time of anything! Death itself is not an evil to a friend of God; he may say, Come, let us go quickly to our Father's house; our Father calls us" (*Epict.*).—*Jeneway's Quotations*.

The concluding words were calculated to draw his attention to the subject as affecting the interests of his kingdom. The Jews were an industrious race. Dispersed throughout the kingdom of Persia, they had devoted themselves to the pursuits of agriculture and commerce. They were captives, but not properly slaves, having their settlements here and there, for the cultivation of the soil or for merchandise, as their inclination led; and, although foreigners, yet mixed up with the general population of the country, and in the character of quiet, peaceful subjects, contributing toward the general wealth and prosperity. That they were not burdensome for their support, but, as to temporal matters, in a flourishing condition, is very manifest from Haman's offer to pay out of their spoil so large a sum into the royal treasury. To have swept away, then, by a wholesale slaughter, a race so active and industrious as the Jews were, would have been to inflict a heavy blow upon the prosperity of the kingdom. Their spoils might be a present benefit to the royal exchequer, but the loss entailed upon the national wealth would be permanent and irreparable. And the difference would not be great as to the national loss, if they were not to be destroyed, but merely reduced to the state of slavery. If sold as slaves, and carried away into other countries by the slave-merchants of Tyre and Sidon, the price

paid for them would be a poor return for the fruit of their continued industry as the subjects of the Persian king. And if they were made slaves in his own dominions, there would be the loss to his revenue of so much active enterprise on the part of a people who paid all the public taxes, and increased the national resources by the cultivation of the soil and foreign trading. Esther seems to have known better than the king did, and better than some modern politicians have done, or yet do, the secret of the wealth of nations. To annihilate an industrious and peaceful people she represents as an act equally cruel and impolitic. To substitute slave-labour for the labour and vigorous and persevering industry of freemen she speaks of as also most opposed to the real interests of the state. This is the meaning of her words: "If we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage." The sentiment here expressed is far in advance of the age in which Esther lived, and the truth and significance of it have often been illustrated since her time, although only illustrated so as to indicate that its importance was not yet estimated, nor the wisdom of it practically felt. Thus, for example, when persecution against the friends of Protestantism raged fiercely in France and Belgium, and those who preferred the religion of the Bible to Popery had to choose between remaining at home to be massacred, or seeking a refuge abroad, a vast number of the most intelligent and industrious of the population took refuge in England and Scotland, bringing their skill and industry with them to benefit the land of their adoption. History settles it as a fact beyond all question, that these refugees for conscience' sake contributed more largely to the industrial and commercial advancement of this country than it would be easy to calculate. For in those days we were far behind our continental neighbours in the practice of the mechanical and useful arts; and thus the bigotry and cruelty which drove multitudes to seek an asylum in this island, dried up the sources of

the wealth of the countries from which they came, while Britain, on the other hand, was rewarded for opening her arms to shelter the oppressed by obtaining all the benefit of their intelligence and labour, as not only skilful artisans, but peaceful and religious citizens.

And then again, with respect to the difference between the exertions and enterprise of freemen for the real advantage of a country, as contrasted with slaves, Esther's judgment was far more correct, for instance, than that of the Americans, who boast so much of their liberty and their political wisdom; and her judgment is corroborated by the sentiments of all intelligent travellers, who have recorded their experience in passing through those States of America where slavery is legalized.* The labour which is exacted by the lash is neither so well performed nor so great in amount as that which is paid for. There is no inducement to the slave to cultivate his intellect. When he sees that he cannot better his condition, he naturally sinks into a state of apathy, or endeavours by craft and cunning to over-reach his task-masters. And thus, altogether, the just law of Providence comes in to punish the avarice and cruelty of those who trample upon the rights of their fellow-men. For while the strength of a country consists, humanly speaking, in the amount of its industrious population, with a full supply of the means of subsistence—every man being free to employ his mind and his labour in the field which he thinks will be most profitable—the increase of a slave population is a source of positive weakness, as well as a growing cause of insecurity. Apart altogether from the evils and sinfulness of the system of slavery, as opposed to the great law of love which Christ came to enforce and establish, and apart from the danger which results from the preponderance of a class between whom and those above them there cannot be any real good-will and sympathy, slavery is a positive loss to a community in all respects, whether moral or social; and

* Though slavery is abolished in America, Davidson's remarks hold good and may be read with profit.

Esther spoke the truth when she denounced it as calculated to work damage to the king.—*Davidson*.

Vers. 1, 2. *So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.*

Haman, honoured with the king's society at the banquet of wine, might expect to be consoled for his late disappointment by new expressions of the royal favour. But soon did his hope of any remedy prove like the giving up of the ghost. He was brought to the banquet, not that he might enjoy the queen's smiles, but that he might hear an accusation against himself, which touched his life, and to which he could not answer.

The king persisted in his kind sentiments towards Esther. For the third time, he promises, whatever her petition was, to grant it, even to the half of the kingdom. Who would not have been emboldened by a promise so often given? To have deferred the petition any longer would have but argued an ungrateful distrust of the king's sincerity. Let us remember how much greater encouragement we have to present our requests to God, and what distrust we discover of his faithfulness if we do not come before his throne of grace with boldness. No less than six times, in the compass of one sentence,* does our Lord

* Matt. vii. 7, 8.

Jesus assure us that our prayers shall be heard.

Ver. 3. *Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given at my petition, and my people at my request.*

Esther at last ventured to bring forth her request. The nature of the case pressed her. The king's solicitations urged her. His kindness and his promises encouraged her. Unnecessary delays are dangerous, especially in matters of great importance.

The request was for her life, and the life of her people. The king was no less surprised at this petition than Festus was at hearing the accusation of the Jews against Paul. It was certainly not for any such thing as the king supposed. It never came into his mind that his beloved queen could have any occasion to present a petition to him for her life. Although by his own authority (but without his knowledge) a sentence of death had been pronounced against her, it must have astonished him to hear that she and her people were doomed to destruction; and it must astonish the reader of this history that the king, five years after his marriage with the queen, should have passed a sentence of death upon her whole nation without knowing it. Into such absurdities are princes led who are too indolent to look into their own affairs, and leave them to be managed without control by favourites, who have their own interests to serve, and their own passions to gratify.—*Lawson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 5, 6.

THE DOINGS OF A WICKED HEART.

Ahasuerus was yet in the dark. He had signed the decree for the extermination of the Jews at the instigation of Haman, he had seen Haman's great ambition, he had heard Esther's piteous appeal, but still he is not sharp enough to fix upon Haman as the offender. Perhaps it is that he does know, but waits to have a clear declaration from Esther's own lips, but waits to see the case plainly settled that Haman was the guilty one.

I. A wicked heart induces foolhardiness. There is wisdom apparent in the renderings given by the translators of the Bible. They speak, for the most part, as if inspired by the Holy Ghost. Very suggestive is their rendering of the question uttered by Ahasuerus. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his

heart to do so?" The daring presumption of those impelled by wicked hearts is indeed appalling. A wicked heart is both deceitful and deceiving. Haman's wicked heart must have deceived him as to the daring nature of the course he had been pursuing. He only thought of gratifying an evil nature, and did not calmly consider the possible and very probable bitter consequences. This is characteristic of wicked hearts through all time. The foolhardiness of the wicked is astonishing. They appear as if bereft of their senses. When we see how clumsily they proceed to work, we ask, How could they hope to escape detection? What induced them to take the fatal step? How is it that they actually permit themselves to be caught in their own toils?

II. A wicked heart, sooner or later, meets with open condemnation. "And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." It may be true that the wicked heart does not always meet with a righteous and indignant Esther come to judgment. Yet it cannot escape either here or hereafter. It will either discover itself or be discovered. The wicked heart will discover itself by its wicked fruits. For a long time it may work in secret, but ultimately all will be revealed. He that doeth evil may avoid the light, but he cannot always escape its detecting rays. There is only one way of escape, but there is one way, and it is all-sufficient. That one way is repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. If the light shines upon the wicked heart, and the man sees with holy remorse the evil of his nature, then there may be, and is, a way of escape. If we say the wicked heart must meet with open condemnation, we mean if that wicked heart will not condemn itself, but continues obdurate and impenitent.

III. A wicked heart leads to fearfulness. "Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen." The wicked flee when no man pursueth. If a man has not his sensibilities all deadened, then he must be afraid in the midst of his wickedness. All the annals of crime tell us that fearfulness surprises the wicked. They live in constant terrors. Haman, however, had now outward reason for fear. How greatly was he troubled at this crisis! He had fears within. There were fightings against him without. Easy it is for us to say that Haman was a coward. Who would not have been a coward under the trying circumstances? A virtuous soul may be calm and brave in the face of outward terrors; but strange would it be if a vicious soul did not give way to fear. Hardened sinners may pass through the terrors of time with apparently unmoved natures; but in the great day of Divine wrath they will say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5, 6.

Now Queen Esther musters up her inward forces, and, with an undaunted courage, fixing her angry eyes upon the hated Agagite, she says, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." The word was loath to come forth, but it strikes home at the last. Never till now did Haman hear his true title; before, some had styled him noble, others great, others magnificent, and some, perhaps, virtuous; only Esther gave him his own, "Wicked Haman." Ill-deserving greatness doth in vain promise to itself a perpetuity of applause. If our ways be foul, the time shall come when, after all vain flattery, after

all our momentary glory, our sins shall be ripped up, and our iniquities laid before us, to our utter confusion. With what consternation did Haman now stand! How do we think he looked to hear himself thus enstayed, thus accused, yea, thus condemned? Certainly death was in his face, and horror in every one of his joints. No sense, no limb knows his office. Fain would he speak; but his tongue falters, and his lips tremble. Fain would he make apologies upon his knees; but his heart fails him, and tells him the evidence is too great. Only guiltiness and fear look through his eyes upon the enraged countenance

of his master, which now bodes nothing to him but revenge and death.—*Bishop Hall.*

Ver. 5. *Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?*

What! to compass the death of the queen, and, as if that were too small a wickedness, the destruction of all her people also! Was a man so wicked to be found in any of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the king's dominions? If there were such a daring criminal to be found, no death was too terrible for him.

What, then, will our Lord do when he rises up to revenge the wrongs done to himself in the persons of his brethren; of those who are espoused to him in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies? Will he not account the wrongs done to them to have been done to himself? When he maketh inquisition for blood, woe to them that are stained with bloody crimes against his people. The wrath of Ahasuerus against the enemies of the Jews was a fruit of God's wrath against them. He forgot not his promise to Abraham, "I will bless him that blesseth thee, and I will curse him that curseth thee."

"What and where is he that durst do this thing?"—What if Ahasuerus himself is the man, although it would have been unwise in the queen to tell him that he was. He was certainly, though unconscious of it, a partner in this wickedness; and yet he was filled with horror at hearing that any person could

dare to load himself with such guilt. Thus David was filled with anger against a man who was only the emblem of himself.* Consider what abhorrence you have of the sins of other men, and consider how like your own sins are to theirs, and let your souls be humbled within you. Take care how you speak of the sins of other men, lest your tongues condemn yourselves. Your sins are probably much liker to theirs than you imagine, till you have well considered the matter. Perhaps they are a great deal worse, when every circumstance is considered.

Ver. 6. *And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.*

Haman now finds for what reason he was invited by the queen to her banquet. It was, to be accused to his face of the blackest crime. He had an opportunity of saying what could be said (if anything could be said) in his own vindication, or in mitigation of his offence. But if he had nothing to say, it was to be expected that the confusion of his face would be a witness against him.

This was actually the case. "Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen." He had too good reason to tremble for his life. The queen had brought a dreadful accusation against him, and his guilt was too apparent to be denied or to be extenuated. It was, besides, of a nature fitted to excite the king's fiercest indignation and bitterest rage.—*Lawson.*

* 2 Sam. xii.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 7, 10.

THE FEAR, THE FOLLY, AND THE DOOM OF THE EVIL-DOER.

After Ahasuerus had heard Esther's accusation, he went out into the palace garden. Wrath was in his countenance; wrath in his hasty tread. The sweet air of the palace garden, laden with rich odours, did not allay his anger. No soft music was found strong enough to drive away the evil spirit. Angry he went forth, and angry he returned. The offence was of too grave a character to be thus easily forgotten. It is not for us here to conjecture how far Ahasuerus might have gone on the line of forgiveness. Perhaps it was needful for the interests of his government that this bad man (Haman) should be at once brought to judgment. In human codes the boundary line of forgiveness is soon reached. In the Divine

administration there is the exercise of forgiveness on a vast scale. But even there we seem to find a limit. If men reject all the Divinely-appointed means for obtaining pardon, there only remaineth "a certain fearful looking for of judgment." "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Men must not trifle with the Divine nature. God is merciful, but God is just. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found."

I. The evil-doer receives warning. "Haman saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." At present Haman had not ascertained the extent and the nature of the evil; but he clearly heard the sound of the avenging deity, though his feet might be shod with wool. The wrath on the king's countenance and the guilt in Haman's soul both tended to give him awful warning. Evil-doers receive warning. Nature gives warning. She declares that evil-doing must bring damage sooner or later. She is stern, and will not suffer her great laws to be violated with impunity. Revelation gives warning. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." History gives warning. The warnings too are given long before it is too late. The evil-doer when meeting the doom of his crimes will not be able justly to say, Had I known only in time! had some voice only spoken early enough to arrest me in the career of crime! The voices do speak, but the evil-doer turns a deaf ear. Oh, let us listen to every warning voice; let us be wise in time. Haman now heard the warning voice, but it was almost too late. But it may not yet be too late for us. "Hear, and your soul shall live."

II. The foolish evil-doer works his own destruction. Perhaps anything that Haman could have done at this crisis would not have been efficacious to avert his awful doom. May we not suppose, however, that if Esther had seen the signs of genuine repentance in Haman, and had heard from his lips a sincere confession of his baseness and of his guilt, she would have done something for his pardon? But he did not take this course. He was found by the king in a position that tended to excite still more the king's wrath. The very means that Haman took to save his life was the means of bringing about his speedy execution. All through this history Haman is seen working for his own destruction, though he thought he was working for the destruction of his enemies. Sinners work their own destruction, and bring upon themselves their own awful doom. In this connection we may rightly speak of the inexorable nature of law. It is a dreadful thing to sin against the great laws of nature and of revelation. "Our God is a consuming fire." We bring upon ourselves our own punishment. In this sense we are the dread arbiters of our own fearful fate.

III. The evil-doer raises striking evidence of his own guilt. "Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman." Crafty as Haman might be, he was not crafty enough to keep his vile purpose a secret. It was evidently well known for whom the gallows was intended. Haman in raising the gallows was preparing a terrible and irresistible evidence against himself. Facts are stubborn things, and whatever poor Haman might attempt to say in his own defence, he could not talk down the gallows raised fifty cubits high. There it was to speak for itself, and to condemn the guilty Haman. How often in life do we see the evil-doer making a gallows fifty cubits high! The sinner unwittingly writes bitter things against himself, and the writing is brought forth in an evil hour to his condemnation. "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?"

IV. The evil-doer is practically his own executioner. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai." We must pity Haman in his direful doom; still we feel as if there was a certain fitness in the case. Our natures approve the law of retribution. We seem to feel that unblushing crime

should not go unpunished. The course and the doom of Haman may not be the exact counterpart of every evil-doer's course and doom; yet there is here portrayed a great general law which we would do well to note with all seriousness. When we come to harm on account of our sins, we are too apt to blame our fellows, to blame our circumstances, to blame the devil. We ought to blame ourselves. We only get hung on the gallows we ourselves have erected. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Let us at once proceed, by repenting of our pride, our hate, and our jealousy, to destroy the gallows. Let us look by faith to the cross, and all that is signified thereby, and then any other cross raised by sinful folly will be diverted of its power to do us lasting damage.

"Then was the king's wrath pacified." The flattering minion was removed out of his sight. The projector of wholesale murder was himself destroyed. Ahasuerus himself was not safe so long as Haman was allowed to exist. Wrath, however, is cruel, and nothing but Haman's death could pacify the angry king. If it must needs be that capital punishment be the portion of certain transgressors, the sentence should not be carried out in order to pacify wrath, but to meet the demands of justice, as a deterrent to crime, and to promote the public safety. Well were it if we could dispense with the gallows. Well were it if strict justice tempered by mercy always administered the law to transgressors. God's laws are always wisely and righteously administered. Never yet can it be said that God's wrath was pacified by the execution of any sinner. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not an exhibition of Divine wrath, but of Divine love. It was the method by which God could be just, and yet the Justifier of the believer. It may be a mystery, but there is in the remedial scheme of the gospel more mercy than mystery.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—10.

The king indeed is unjust in fixing this calumny upon Haman; but God is just, who permits the righteous penalty to fall upon him for his lies and calumnies, inasmuch as he would have brought violence upon other virgins or matrons and would have plunged the whole people of God into ruin. Accordingly, it is written, "By what one sinneth, by that also shall he be punished;" and again, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again." —*Fearful.*

It must also so happen in the just judgment of God, that since the highest minister of state had caused the highest gallows to be erected, in accordance with his greatness of feeling and state position and honours, before which all bowed in adoration to the earth, he should himself be elevated above all other people that were hung. —*Starke.*

Said before the king.] Not a man opens his mouth to speak for Haman, but all against him. Had the cause been better, thus it would have been. Every cur is ready to fall upon the dog that he seeth worried; every man ready

to pull a branch from the tree that is falling. Cromwell had experience of this when once he fell into displeasure by speaking against the king's match with Lady Catherine Howard, in defence of Queen Anne of Cleve, and discharge of his conscience, for the which he suffered death, Stephen Gardiner being the chief engineer. Had Haman's cause been like his, albeit he had found as few friends to intercede for him as Cromwell, yet he might have died with as much comfort as he did. But he died more like to the Lord Hungerford, of Hatesby, who was beheaded together with the noble Cromwell; but neither so Christianly suffering nor so quietly dying for his offence committed against nature, viz., buggery. Cromwell exhorted him to repent, and promised him mercy from God; but his heart was hardened, and so was this wicked Haman's. God, therefore, justly set off all hearts from him in his greatest necessity; and now, to add to his misery, brings another of his foul sins to light, that he might be the more condignly cut off. —*Trapp.*

It was an excellent saying of Ambrose,

"If thou canst not hide thyself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide thyself from him, whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun!" You know what Ahasuerus, that great monarch, said concerning Haman: "What," saith he, "will he force the queen before me in the house?" There was killing emphasis in the words "before me." Will he force the queen before me? What, will he dare to commit such villany, and I stand and look on? O sirs, to sin in the sight of God is a thing that he looks upon as the greatest affront, and as the highest indignity that can possibly be done unto him.—*Brooks*.

The thought which is at once suggested to our minds in connection with Haman's execution on the gallows which he had himself prepared for Mordecai, is that of a righteous retribution in providence, a subject which cannot be too delicately handled, nor too cautiously and reservedly applied. There are some who are always ready to interpret calamity as a retribution in providence, with the greatest self-blindness as to their own sins. Let a terrible accident happen to a railway train travelling on sabbath day, and some will be found to describe it as a retribution in providence against sabbath desecration. Alas! Do they never desecrate the sabbath, that they should be so ready to give a stone for bread to the wounded and mourning? Let a theatre, or some other place of public resort not generally approved of, be destroyed by fire, and many lives lost, and some will discourse upon it, in like manner, as a retribution in providence. Do they not reflect that build-ings devoted to useful manufacture, and even to the worship of God, have been destroyed in the same way, and with similar disastrous results? If they would not venture to apply the rule in the one case, why should they do it in the other? Cowper has put the doctrine of a universal providence in two lines, with which we must all agree:—

"Happy the man who sees a God employed
In all the good and ill that chequer life."

But when men sit in judgment upon

God's judgments, and apply the law of retribution in particular cases, according to their own notions of things, they are in danger, like Job's friends, of mistaking the chastisement of God's children for signal marks of his disapprobation, or, like the barbarians on the island of Melita, who conceived that Paul must be a murderer when the viper had come out of the fire and fastened on his hand, but who, when he had shaken it off and suffered no harm, changed their minds, and said that he must be a god. Better for us rather to make the personal application of all the calamities which occur in the providence of God recommended in the Gospel by Luke, and read therein these words of solemn warning:—"Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

But whilst we cannot consent to men becoming the interpreters of God's judgments in particular cases, we have a great law of retribution clearly indicated as well in the Bible as in profane history. We may call the illustrations of it which might be adduced simply coincidences; but the sin is so conspicuously stamped on the punishment that we can hardly avoid connecting the one with the other in providence. The guilty Agagite takes the place of the unoffending Jew, and bears the punishment which he had prepared for him. Joseph's brethren sold Joseph into Egypt, and by-and-by they were themselves carried down into Egypt. Adoni-bezek had the thumbs and great toes of threescore and ten kings cut off, and when he himself was taken in battle Judah and Simeon had his own thumbs and great toes cut off, moving him to make this confession: "As I have done, so God hath required me." Herod the Great massacred the innocent little children of Bethlehem, and he himself was overwhelmed with agonizing physical disease, and his numerous family was extinct in a hundred years. Pontius Pilate, who condemned Christ to death; Judas, who betrayed him; and Nero, who slew thousands of early believers, committed suicide, though the last had to call in the aid of others to complete what he had begun. Almost all the

prominent persecutors of the Church have died deaths of violence. Maximinus put out the eyes of thousands of Christians, and afterwards he himself died of a fearful disease of the eyes, in great agony. And Valens, who caused fourscore presbyters to be sent to sea in a ship and burnt alive, himself, defeated by the Goths, fled to a cottage where he was burnt alive. Still more comprehensively we have the Apostle Paul declaring, with reference to those who "received not the love of the truth that they might be saved," that they would be smitten with judicial blindness; "and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

In avoiding Scylla we must beware of falling into Charybdis; in refusing to become interpreters of particular calamitous providences, we must be on our guard against denying a retributive providence altogether. No doubt this speciality in providence comprehends both nations and individuals, noiselessly overtaking evil-doers and causing them to reap as they had sown, according to the proverb—"The feet of the avenging deity are shod with wool." Without commotion or tumult the punishment grows out of the sin, and the transgressor is visited according to his iniquity. In most instances it requires no direct interference of the Almighty, but follows, surely and directly, from the operation of great natural and spiritual laws. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

Then a reflection of a different kind is suggested by the feelings of the king after the execution of Haman: "Then was the king's wrath pacified." Modern theology is apt to drift away into mere sentimental views of the character of God. It may be a reaction from the harsh and terrible aspects in which the Divine character was presented in a former age, giving to childhood and youth such an idea of God as was fitted rather to excite terror than inspire with reverence and love. From one extreme,

however, we must be careful not to dart to another, equally false and dangerous. We must not conceive of God as simply all love and mercy. We cannot indeed exalt too highly these perfections of his nature, but we must not allow them to shut out from view other attributes of his being. Let these alone have possession of our minds, and we might suppose that there was no need for God being reconciled to sinners, but only of them being reconciled to him; that he is all love and mercy toward them if they would only return to him, and that he will be their Father if they will only submit to be his children. There is a measure of truth in this kind of reasoning, but it is only a half-truth; and a half-truth is sometimes more perilous than unmitigated error. He assures us that he is "angry with the wicked every day;" that he is a "consuming fire;" and that he will "by no means clear the guilty." Though his wrath against the wicked has nothing of vindictiveness or revenge in it, yet is it none the less, but the more, wrath—tremendous wrath. If a king is merciful and loving, as well as just and righteous, his wrath is all the more to be dreaded; and whilst God is infinitely loving and merciful, he cannot allow his love and mercy to overreach his justice, righteousness, and truth. So long as we keep in view only the paternal aspects of the Divine character, we might see in the cross of Christ nothing more than an exhibition of love and mercy, to attract, if possible, the regards of mankind sinners; no real satisfaction offered for sin—"the just for the unjust"—but only a proof and pledge that God was kindly disposed toward them if they would only return to him. How defective and misleading would be such a contemplation of the cross of Christ! Besides the expression of love, it is the endurance by One who was able to bear it, because he had no sin, of the penalty and curse of sin in the room of all who believe. So that only when we come to God, presenting in faith the atonement for sin which Christ made on Calvary, is God's wrath pacified, and the sinner not simply reconciled to him, but he also to the sinner.

The claims of his law and the demands of his righteous government are only and fully satisfied in Christ. Accordingly, we cannot tell the sinner that God's wrath is pacified towards him so long as he has not accepted Christ, and is not to be found in him. It is true that God is all loving and merciful; but his love and mercy cannot reach him so long as he is outside of Christ. Apart from Christ, through unbelief, he cannot be otherwise surveyed than as exposed to wrath—a wrath which shall find its full manifestation in the decisions and allotments of the final day. But in Christ, received by faith, that wrath has already emptied itself and been exhausted in him, and for the true believer there are only love and mercy—love and mercy, the fulness of which can be measured only by the greatness of the sacrifice made, in order that they might rest with him for ever. “He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” “Then was the king's wrath pacified.”—*McEwan*.

As of one crucified, whose visage spake
Fell rancour, malice deep, wherein he died;
And round him Ahasuerus the great king;
Esther his bride; and Mordecai the just,
Blameless in word and deed.

Carey's Dante.

Thus Pharaoh drowns the Hebrew males in a river; therefore is drowned himself with his army in a sea. He had laid insupportable burdens on Israel; God returns them with full weight, number, measure. When Israel cut off the thumbs and great toes of Adonibezek, hear the maimed king confess the equity of this judgment: “Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me.” As proud Bajazet threatened to serve Tamerlane, being conquered,—to imprison him in a cage of iron, and carry him about the world in triumph,—so the Scythian, having took the bragging Turk, put him to the punishment himself had lessoned; carrying and carting him through Asia, to be scorned of his own people. Thus Haman is hanged on his own gallows.

Perillus tries the trick of his own torment.—*Adams*.

When Haman desires the ruin of the Jews, procures the king's commission, sends despatches to all the governors of the provinces, sets up a gibbet for Mordecai, and wants nothing but an opportunity to request the execution, he tumbles down to exchange his prince's favours for an exaltation on the gallows. When the serpent increased his malicious cruelty, and cast out a flood against the Church, God makes the earth, the carnal world, to give her assistance, and repel the force that Satan used against her. “The earth helped the woman.” When “multitudes shall gather together in the valley of decision,” then shall “the Lord roar out of Sion, and be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.” And when spiritual Egypt shall make a war against Christ, who sits upon the white horse, and combine all their force for the destruction of his people, then shall the beast and the false prophet be taken, and brought to their final ruin, and their force be broken in a lake of fire, as that of Egypt was in a sea of water. The time of their greatest fierceness shall be the time of Christ's fury.—*Charnock*.

Haman missed of his plot; he fell into danger; he fell into the same danger which he contrived for Mordecai; and was the means of Mordecai's advancement. It had been enough to have woven a spider's web, which is done with a great deal of art, and yet comes to nothing; but to hatch a cockatrice's egg, that brings forth a viper which stings to death, this is a double vexation. Yet thus God delighteth to catch the “wise in the imagination of their own hearts,” and to pay them in their own coin. The wicked carry a lie in their right hand; for they trust in man, who is but a *lie*; and, being liars themselves too, no marvel if their hopes prove deceitful, so that, while they sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind.

Mischievous attempts are unsuccessful in the long run; for did ever any harden themselves against God and prosper long? Let Cain speak, let Pharaoh, Haman, Antiochus, Herod; let the persecutors

of the Church for the first two hundred years, let all that ever bore ill-will towards Sion, speak, and they will confess they did but kick against the pricks, and dash against the rocks. The greatest torment of the damned spirit is, that God turns all his plots for the good of those he hates most. He tempted man to desire to become like God, that so he might ruin him; but God became man, and so restored him. God serveth him-

self of this arch-politician and all his instruments; they are but executioners of God's will while they rush against it. Joseph's brethren sold him that they might not worship him, and that was the very means whereby they came at length to worship him. God delights to take the oppressed party's part. Wicked men cannot do God's children a 'greater pleasure than to oppose them, for by this means they help to advance them.—*Sibbes*.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VII.

Vers. 3, 4. Philosopher and enraged emperor. Joseph charged his brethren that they should come no more in his sight, unless they brought Benjamin with them. We come at our peril into God's presence if we leave his beloved Benjamin, our dear Jesus, behind us. When the philosopher heard of the enraged emperor's menace, that the next time he saw him he would kill him, he took up the emperor's little son in his arms, and saluted him with a Potesne, Thou canst not now strike me. God is angry with every man for his sins. Happy is he that can catch up his Son Jesus; for in whose arms soever the Lord sees his Son, he will spare him. The men of Tyre were fain to intercede to Herod by Blastus. Our intercession to God is made by a higher and surer way; not by his servant, but by his Son.—*Adams*.

There is a notable story which is commonly by divines applied to our present purpose; it is concerning a law among the Molossians, where whosoever came to the king with his son in his arms should be accepted with favour, let his fault be what it might. So let a man be what he will before, yet if he come to God in Christ he cannot be thrust away.—*Janeway*.

The full chest hidden. In the very last year of the Arctic expeditions, last year or the year before, they found an ammunition chest that Commander Parry had left there fifty years ago, safe under a pile of stones, the provisions inside being perfectly sweet and good, and eatable. There it had lain all those years, and men had died of starvation within arm's length of it. It was there all the same. And so, if I may venture to vulgarize the great theme that I am trying to speak about, God has given us his Son, and in him all that pertains to life and all that pertains to godliness. My brothers, take the things that are freely given to men of God.—*McLaren*.

The gipsy horse-stealer. There was a time in our country's history when, according to our Draconic code, death was the penalty of horse-stealing. This awful sentence was passed on a poor gipsy who had been guilty of this crime, and no hope of mercy was held out. The young man, for he was but a youth, immediately fell on his

knees, and with uplifted hands and eyes addressed the judge as follows: "Oh, my lord, save my life!" The judge replied, "No, you can have no mercy in this world; I and my brother judges have come to the determination to execute horse-stealers, especially gipsies, because of the increase of the crime." The suppliant on his knees still entreated, "Oh, my lord judge, save my life. Do, for God's sake, for my wife's sake, for my child's sake!" "No," replied the judge; "you should have thought of your wife and child before;" and the poor fellow was literally dragged away from his earthly judge. Haman pleaded for his life, but he was taken to the gallows. Vast is the mercy of Heaven. At the eleventh hour the sinner repenting and confessing and believing may find mercy.

Ver. 7. The French king. By imploring mercy perhaps you may be saved, but by justifying the injury you cannot but be lost. As the French king, Francis the First, said to a woman kneeling and crying to him for justice, "Stand up, woman, for justice I owe thee; if thou beggest anything, beg mercy." So if you request anything of God, let it be mercy, for he owes you justice; and in this point, God be merciful to you all.

Judge Jeffreys. Very cruel people are sometimes very cowardly. Judge Jeffreys could go through his black assize in the west of England, the terror of the land, manifesting the fury of a wild beast; but when the tide turned, and he saw nothing before him but ignominy and disgrace, he sank into a state of abject fear which was pitiable to see. "Haman was afraid before the king and the queen?" As he well may be. It is an awful moment. His life trembles in the balance. If the king keeps his couch he may be spared. If he rises up abruptly, and withdraws, he is doomed. The king's retirement is like passing solemn judgment. The custom has descended to our times, and the Shah of Persia, or, if not he, certainly some of his immediate predecessors, have condemned men to death in this way.—*Dr. Raleigh*.

Case of retribution. Tamerlane the Great, having made war on Bajazet, Emperor of the Turks, overthrew him in battle, and took him

prisoner. The victor gave the captive monarch at first a very civil reception; and, entering into familiar conversation with him, said, "Now, king, tell me freely and truly what thou wouldst have done with me, had I fallen into thy power?" Bajazet, who was of a fierce and haughty spirit, is said to have thus replied: "Had the gods given unto me the victory, I would have enclosed thee in an iron cage, and carried thee about with me as a spectacle of derision to the world." Tamerlane wrathfully replied, "Then, proud man, as thou wouldst have done to me, even so shall I do unto thee." A strong iron cage was made, into which the fallen emperor was thrust; and thus exposed like a wild beast, he was carried along in the train of his conqueror. Nearly three years were passed by the once mighty Bajazet in this cruel state of durance; and at last, being told that he must be carried into Tartary, despairing of then obtaining his freedom, he struck his head with such violence against the bars of his cage, as to put an end to his wretched life.—*Dr. Cheever*.

Innocence vindicated. It is stated as a singular

circumstance in the history of the holy and devoted John Graham, of Ardelach, that he quoted these words not long before his death:—"If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord had not sent me." He had been a victim to the foulest accusations, and driven from his ministerial charge. The utterance was fulfilled in mysterious ways. Those who had persecuted and calumniated him died off long ere old age; by accident, by sudden and fatal sickness, or by their own hands. Thus it has pleased God, on some occasions, to vindicate the reputation of a faithful servant by providences which none can dispute. Mordecai's innocence was vindicated. His triumph was complete. Poor Haman was humiliated, defeated, and executed. If the history of human lives could be rightly interpreted and correctly written, startling and triumphant revelations would be made. It would be seen that the wicked do not always triumph. They cannot; for surely eternity will adjust the false measures of time, if time itself does not so rectify.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.] 1.] The Targums understand by "house" all the people in it, and the entire property belonging thereto.—*Lange*. The confiscation of the property of one publicly executed followed as a matter of course. And to whom could the goods of the Jews' enemy be more appropriately transferred than to Esther the queen?—*Whedon*. **Came before the king]** Was made one of his officers. **2. Took off his ring]** (See ch. iii. 10). By this act Mordecai was advanced to the post of first minister of the king. The king's seal gave the force of law to royal edicts.—*Keil*. A pleasure-seeking Persian king, like Xerxes, was glad to be relieved of the toil of governing, and willingly committed to one favorite after another the task of issuing and sealing with the royal signet the decrees by which the government was administered.—*Rawlinson*. **3.]** Haman was dead, but the edict which he had issued remained in force: therefore Esther "wept and made supplication" to Ahasuerus. **5.]** The introductory formula are in part similar to those used before, but strengthened by the introduction of two new phrases. **Let it be written to reverse the letters]** Perhaps Esther was not sufficiently acquainted with Persian law to know that no royal decree could be reversed.—*Whedon*. **7.]** The answer of Ahasuerus is a refusal, but one softened as much as possible. He first dwells on the proofs he had just given of his friendly feeling towards the Jews; he then suggests that something may be done to help them without revoking the decree. Finally, he excuses himself by appealing to the well-known immutability of Persian law.—*Rawlinson*. Sheltering his imbecility behind the immutability of the law, the king commits the work of saving the Jews to the wit of Mordecai; but reminds him that his device shall stand. Thus Ahasuerus prepares the way for a most fearful conflict of laws. "The suggestion of Ahasuerus quickened the inventive powers of Esther and Mordecai. The scribes were at once summoned, and a decree issued, not revoking the former one, but allowing the Jews to stand on their defence, and to kill all who attacked them. It has been pronounced incredible that any king would thus have sanctioned civil war in all the great cities of his empire; but some even of the more sceptical critics have pronounced that Xerxes might not improbably have done so."—*De Wette*. Besides, there would be no slaughter at all if their enemies did not first attack the Jews. The probability was, that, when the Jews were permitted to arm themselves and stand on the defensive, there would be no conflict at all. But the result showed, that, in many parts of the empire, the heathen attempted to destroy the Jews in spite of the edict.—*Whedon*. **10.]** Posts on horseback. On horseback, on coursers, government coursers, the sons of the stud.—*Keil*. **Sent letters by posts]** This is one of many intimations in this book calculated to engage the attention of those who take interest in studying the progress of society in the arts of convenience and civilization. The testimony of the Greek writers coincides with this, in directing our attention to Persia for the origin of posts and couriers. It is said, that, when the empire became so

vast, as in the time of Cyrus, that monarch thought of a plan for facilitating the exchange of communication between the court and provincial governments. After having ascertained how far a good horse might go in a day with ease and expedition, he caused stables to be erected at the determined distances throughout his dominions, each with a suitable establishment of horses, and men to take care of them. There was also a post-master at each of these stages, whose duty it was to receive the packets as they arrived, and immediately despatch them with fresh horses and couriers. Thus the posts travelled night and day, without intermission; and hence it was proverbially said that they flew faster than cranes. The expedition with which the king was enabled by this process to obtain intelligence from, and forward edicts to, the remotest parts of his empire, astonished the ancient world. Their admiration resembled that with which European travellers regarded the posting establishments of the Mongol empire, which seems to have been similar to that of the ancient Persians. There is a full and interesting description of it in 'Marco Polo' (ii. 90), a few particulars of which may serve to complete the idea of Oriental establishments of this class. From the capital (Kambalu) roads extended to every part of the empire, having post-houses, with suitable furniture, at every twenty-five or thirty miles. There were altogether ten thousand of these stations, with two hundred thousand horses. The post rode two hundred, and sometimes two hundred and fifty, miles in a day, on occasions of rebellion in the provinces, or other urgent matters. There were other stations, consisting of a few dwellings, three or four miles asunder, occupied by runners or foot-posts, who, being girded, ran as fast as horses (see the note on 1 Sam. viii. 11). These, in dark nights, ran before the horsemen with links to light them along; they also carried letters, mandates, and parcels, to or from the khan, who thus received news or fruit in two days from places ten stages distant, as from Kambalu to Shangtu. Similar establishments are still kept up in China and Japan.—*Kitto*. 11.] But would not the Jews have defended themselves without any such order from the king? They could expect nothing but death in any case, and, therefore, would have fought with the energy of despair. True, but this edict allowed them to arm and prepare for self-defence. But for this edict, any movement towards self-defence would have been crushed at the very outset. A spasmodic defence with empty hands would have accomplished nothing; but the king's decree enabled the Jews to arm and gather into companies.—*Whedon* (abridged).

14. Being hastened] There were still eight months; but the messengers were hastened that the enemies might be warned not to make any attack, and that the Jews might everywhere have ample time to prepare themselves for self-defence.—*Whedon*. **15. Crown of gold]** Not a crown like the king's, but a mere golden band or coronet.—*Atarah*.—*Rawlinson*. Royal apparel of blue and white. State garments such as became the grand vizier; royal robes of royal colours.—*Whedon*. It is well to compare this description of Mordecai's appearance on leaving the palace with Xenophon's description of the attire in which Cyrus himself appeared in public. "Cyrus himself then appeared, wearing a *turban*, which was raised high above his head, with a vest of a purple colour, half mixed with white; and this mixture of white none else is allowed to wear. On his legs he had yellow buskins; his outer robe was wholly of purple; and about his turban was a diadem or wreath" (Cyrop. viii. 23). Every one of these things occur in the description of Mordecai's royal attire, except the yellow buskins. Xenophon, however, adds, that the diademed turban was *not* peculiar to the king, but was allowed to his relations. This doubtless answers to the "great crown" which Mordecai wore. The description does not correspond with the appearance of the cap which the king wears in the sculptures of Persepolis. This difference, which has perplexed antiquarians, is probably owing to the fact that the sculptures represented the king as he usually appeared in his palace; whereas the description refers to his appearance when he went abroad, or on occasions of high state within-doors.—*Kitto*. The garments in which Mordecai left the king are evidently the State garments of the first minister, which Mordecai received at his installation to his office; and, as such, no fresh token of royal favour, but only his induction in his new dignity, and a sign of his induction to all who saw him issue from the palace so adorned.—*Keil*. **City of Shushan rejoiced]** That is, the inhabitants as a whole. They had probably deprecated the massacre awaiting the Jews, and perhaps apprehended with fear the great disorders and dangers that would ensue.—*Lange*. **16. The Jews had light]** Light (this particular form of the noun occurs only here and Ps. cix. 12) is a figurative expression for prosperity. **17. And many of the people became Jews]** This must not be explained only, as by Clericus and Grotius, of a change of religion on the part of the heathen that they might procure the favour of the queen, and avert the wrath of Mordecai. This may have induced some; but the majority certainly acted from a conviction, forced upon them by the unexpected turn of affairs in favour of the Jews, of the truth of the Jewish religion, and the power of that faith and trust in God manifested by the Jews, and so evidently justified by the fall of Haman, and the promotion of Mordecai.—*Keil*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1, 2.

SUDDEN BUT WISE CHANGES.

In affairs of conscience first thoughts are best. In affairs of prudence second thoughts are best. But even in affairs of conscience deliberation may be necessary, because we do not always know how far conscience may be properly enlightened.

We have to see to it that what we think is the voice of conscience be not some other voice. Sudden movement, then, is very often dangerous and misleading. Make haste slowly is a wise exhortation for the management of human affairs. Many a man has taken a hurried step which has proved disastrous, and which no after movements have been able to remedy. Perhaps the English nation may be considered as moving too slowly. Certainly it takes a long time in this country to repair old abuses. But this very slowness may help to give us our national stability. In these two verses we have sudden changes; but they will be seen to be wise in every respect. There is no reason to suppose that Ahasuerus had any cause to repent of the steps which he now took so suddenly. Without any long parliamentary deliberations he made a prime minister, and most important changes in the court, and all tended to increase the national glory.

I. A sensible reversal. "On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen." Not only was Esther the king's favoured queen, but she showed herself a virtuous and sensible woman—one likely to make a wise disposal of the blessings of wealth. Haman only thought of using wealth for selfish purposes. Esther thought of using her temporal advantages for the good of others. That she so thought we judge by her conduct. She did not talk great things only, but did them. How sadly often do we find in this world that the "house" is possessed by the selfish Haman! What a blessing to the community when the "house" becomes the possession of a benevolent and patriotic Esther! Take the house here as emblematical of Haman's wealth. When the eternal King gives a "house" it becomes us to feel that our responsibility is thereby increased. We must not close the house, but open its doors and its rooms for the benefit of others. Still be careful as to the guests. God has given to each and to all a soul-house. We are to be careful as to the mastership. Let not Satan rule; let Jesus rule, and then there will be light, and gladness, and joy, and honour in the house.

II. A grateful confession. "And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her." The confession was not forced from Esther. She did not utter it by reason of the terrors of the inquisitor; she did not own the relationship because she saw that Mordecai was about to make the declaration; she was impelled to it by a sweet sense of gratitude. Here is one of those omissions in the narrative that we could wish had not been made. A pleasant story was that which Esther had now to tell unto the king. We listen in pleasant fancy as Esther, inspired by gratitude, told the king what Mordecai *was unto her*. She would tell of the blood relationship, but surely she would tell much more. Certainly she told much more if she told *all* that Mordecai was unto her. Sometimes the words fail us, when inspired by gratitude, as we try to tell all that a true-hearted one has been to us. Some there are with whom we have no family connection who have been more to us than the nearest relatives. Esther confers honour on Mordecai by declaring all that he had been unto her. We confer honour by grateful confession of the services rendered to us by others. Let us not forget to acknowledge our indebtedness. And shall we not bring honour to Jesus by the confession of what he has been and is to us. Time will not suffice to tell the tale of the Saviour's doings on our behalf. We have to tell what he is to us in the way of spiritual relationship; we have to tell what he is to us as prophet, priest, and king. The sweet tale will last through eternity.

III. A reasonable token of honour. "And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai." It was just and fair that this honour should be conferred upon Mordecai, for he had rendered important services to the king, and was evidently a man that might be safely trusted with the management of most important affairs. But it was not right that Mordecai had been compelled to wait so long before his services were acknowledged. Time is on the side of him who will but wait; but sometimes we have to wait so long that our

time is over. We do not now live for centuries, and cannot afford to keep on waiting too long. Many a man has waited only for the grave. The only waiting which cannot end in disappointment is that of quietly and hopefully and earnestly doing the work of the Lord, and looking for the crown of glory that fadeth not away. Then the great Master will give his tokens of approval and of honour. Oh, to be sealed by heaven's eternal King!

IV. A judicious arrangement. "And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman." If Esther, having received the gift from the king, was not at liberty to transfer it to Mordecai, the next best thing was to make Mordecai steward of the property. She had received proof of Mordecai's sagacity, and could therefore securely entrust to him the management of her property. He would turn it to the best possible account, both for individual and collective advantage. Having shown himself wise and faithful in small spheres, it was judicious to raise him now to fill a higher sphere. All his recorded after-course declares that he was not unfaithful to his many important trusts. If we want to rise, let it be by faithful service in that sphere where we find ourselves placed. Woe to the man who seeks to rise by trickery! The crash must come sooner or later. The deception must be found out. The blown bladder will receive a prick, and then there will be the humiliating collapse. Many instances of this in modern times. Better to remain always in obscurity than to rise by false methods, for such rising is sure to end in a most hideous down-fall. A high position is always perilous—perilous in England with its stable institutions, as well as in the Persian empire with all its fickleness. But a high position reached by falsehood and deceit is especially perilous. "He that is down needs fear no fall." "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud." Haman thus had not reached the gallows. We can even suppose that Mordecai was happier at the king's gate than when ruling in the palace, and over Haman's house.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1, 2.

We are taught by Mordecai's example that even pious men sometimes come to the head of affairs, and are safely entrusted with the reins of government; and that God adorns with this glory on earth those whom he will afterwards crown in heaven likewise. They are promoted, however not so much for their own sake as that they may aid and promote the Church and people of God, and may free and console those in affliction.—*Fenardent*.

Be not solicitous about treasuring up the riches of this world. What you can gain is to-day yours, to-morrow you know not whose it shall be. Should it fall into the hands of your children after you, you know not whether they will be wise men or fools, whether they will be losers or gainers by the possession of it. But you know not whether it may not fall into the hands of your most abhorred enemies. This is often the fate of ill-gotten riches. "The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." With what

vexation would Haman have thought of that wealth in which he gloried, if he had foreseen that it was to be possessed by a Jewess. Would he not rather have chosen to live a beggar all his days than leave his wealth to persons whom he so mortally hated?

The queen was enriched beyond her expectations and wishes; yet the wealth bestowed upon her would enable her to perform important services to her beloved nation. The donation of it by the king, to whom it was forfeited, was a testimony of his affection, to which she still must have recourse, with new petitions for her people. Above all, this donation was a remarkable testimony of the kindness and justice of the Divine providence, which put into her hands that immense wealth of the enemy of her nation, by which he would have bribed the king, if a bribe had been necessary, to procure their destruction. The Lord had already not only wrought deliverance for her, but had given her an accession of riches

out of the shares that had been laid for her kinsman ; and she was thereby encouraged to hope that he would bring to a happy conclusion that great work that occupied her mind.

Her kinsman, too, was highly advanced, both on her account and his own. The king had formerly caused his favour for Mordecai to be proclaimed through the city of Shushan ; but now he loaded him with real and substantial honours, which could put him into a proper condition for protecting his nation, exposed to danger for his sake.

It was now the fifth year since the adopted daughter of Mordecai was seated on an imperial throne, and hitherto it was not known that he stood in any relation to the queen, or had showed to her the kindness of a father.

The king must surely at least have condemned his own thoughtlessness in inquiring so little after Esther's friends. He now discerned, that, besides his unrequited obligations to Mordecai for saving his life, he owed to him likewise the graces and accomplishments of his queen, and almost her life ; for he had been to her a second father, without whose kind care none knows what might have befallen her in her tender years.

It would be likewise a powerful recommendation of Mordecai, that he had hitherto lived quietly in a low station, without so much as mentioning his claims to preferment. It appeared plainly that he was more careful to deserve the king's favour than to enjoy it, and that greatness had no charms but the opportunities it might give him of doing good, or preventing evil. Those are fittest for high stations that are best satisfied with any station in which Providence is pleased to put them.

The king put Mordecai into Haman's place ; and the queen, who now thought it highly expedient to inform the king of Mordecai's kindness and relation to her, did likewise make him her steward. To her dying day she forgot not the kindness showed to her in the days of her youth, and behaved as the best of daughters to the best of fathers.

Gratitude to benefactors is essential to a virtuous character. If you call a

man ungrateful you need say nothing more of him, you have already said everything that is bad ; nor will the highest elevation excuse forgetfulness of benefits received in a lower condition. The blessed Jesus, exalted above men and angels, forgets none of the kindnesses showed to him in the persons of his brethren in a low condition upon earth ; but what is done to the least of them is rewarded as if it had been done to himself. We need not envy those women who ministered to him of their substance in the days of his humiliation the glorious rewards bestowed upon them in his state of exaltation. We still have it in our power to feed him when he is hungry, to give him drink when he is thirsty, to clothe him when he is naked ; and he will not be unrighteous to forget our works and labours of love to his name. Did Esther in her royal condition retain such a kind remembrance of the friends of her low estate, and shall we doubt of the infinitely superior virtues of him who is the fairest among the children of men, to the operation of whose Spirit we owe everything that is lovely in our temper and conduct ?

Esther, on the throne, retained the kindness of her youth, not only to Mordecai, but to all her friends and all her people.—*Lawson*.

1. In the first place, we see how, in the providence of God, the wealth which worldly men would use in opposition to the interests of God's cause and people may be wrested from them, and made available for the advancement of these interests. It was painful enough to the proud spirit of Haman to be compelled to conduct Mordecai, whom he hated, through the city in triumph ; but it would have been anguish intolerable to him if he had been told that this man was forthwith to be his heir, and to have all his wealth placed at his disposal. So not unfrequently it happens, that the riches which have been accumulated by those who would grudge the expenditure even of a small part for any purpose purely religious, pass into the hands of those who feel their responsibility as stewards of God's bounties, and who gladly employ his gifts for the promotion of objects by

which their fellow-men are really benefited. The conclusion which we draw from all this, and which, without further remark, we leave with you, is, that the best and happiest arrangement which a man can make with respect to the good things which have been bestowed upon him is, that in his lifetime he seek to be personally the dispenser of good to others. If he lives and acts in this spirit, then he will have the less anxiety as to the disposal of what he may be able to leave behind him.

2. In the second place, the peculiar providence which we see exercised in the case of Mordecai teaches us that men may be well content to wait, while they are in the way of well-doing, until they receive their recompense. It was with no view to temporal reward, we most fully believe, that Mordecai assumed the guardianship of his orphan cousin, and brought her up tenderly in the knowledge of the God of her fathers. But if he had any expectation of reward, when he discovered and made known the plot against the life of the king, and such expectation he might have reasonably enough cherished, he had long to wait for the realizing of it. But he waited patiently, and at length his reward came, in greater fulness than his most sanguine hope could have anticipated. Now even in worldly things, although not on the same large scale, we often can mark similar movements of providence. Worth and faithfulness and humility, after they have been long neglected, are brought into the light, and are honoured in proportion to the neglect which they formerly experienced.

But it is not with exclusive, or indeed with special, reference to the administra-

tion of providence in this world that we speak at present. History sets before us the examples of many, who were the excellent of the earth, persons of whom the world was not worthy, whose deeds of benevolence, and whose faithful services to the Lord and the men of their generation, were never openly acknowledged during their lifetime. Against reproach and obloquy, and opposition the most crushing, many have had to pursue their way, compelled to hear even their good evil spoken of. But this does not alter the fact, that the reward of all Christ's faithful servants is certain. It is not for reward that they labour in his service; it is from love to him, and for the glory of God. Yet as Christ himself "looked forward to the joy that was set before him," so his people are taught by his word and his example to have respect to the recompense of reward. Now as Mordecai had to wait for a season before he obtained what he was well entitled to receive, would it have been a matter of great consequence although he had to wait for a few years longer? If he had received at length, after a very protracted season of delay, what he waited for, while he had still full power left him to enjoy it, would it not have been well? Then may we not say, that although believers in Christ have to wait for their reward until death come to carry them away, or, as we may say, until this their last enemy come to lead them in triumph into the presence of the King, clad in the glorious robe of his righteousness, will it not be well, seeing that then they shall be in condition to enjoy fully and for ever the blessedness of being with him and rejoicing in his smile!—*Davidson*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 3, 4.

SIN SURVIVES THE SINNER.

When Haman was executed Ahasuerus doubtless expected to be left at peace. He would suppose that by one strenuous effort he had delivered himself from the encircling confusion; and, unaccustomed to personal effort and responsibility, he would overrate the good he had accomplished. So men are continually surprised if a little virtuous effort is not considered a full compensation for a long course of sin. But evil is not easily rooted out of a heart, or out of a state. Bad habits once

formed in the heart soon become inveterate; and bad institutions once founded in a state tend to perpetuate themselves for ever. It is written in the Psalms, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." So, frequently, sin bears painful fruits long after the sinner himself has grievously repented. Thus David received Divine forgiveness, and yet along with Uriah's life the splendour and happiness of his reign faded away for ever. As he sinned with Bathsheba, so Amnon sinned with Tamar; as he murdered Uriah, so Absalom murdered Amnon; and as his pride numbered the people, so Adonijah's pride, and Absalom's pride, rebelled against his authority. Let no man fancy that by a little repentance he can undo the effects of a great sin. As some weeds are hardly to be eradicated from a favourable soil, so sin finds a congenial lodging in the heart, and is slow to leave. Ahasuerus, who looked to spend his days in idle dalliance, now learnt that Haman's death had not delivered him from his troubles, for Esther came to him to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite.

I. Evil outlives its first contrivers. (*a*) Haman is dead, but the mischief he devised still hangs over the Jews. The laws of Persia could not be reversed, and therefore Haman's edict had to stand; the laws of nature will not be reversed, and therefore a thing done once is done for ever. A passing stranger may loosen a stone in an embankment, and go on his way; but a whole province will bewail his folly. An infidel father trains most carefully an infidel son; the son becomes an eminent and influential writer, and spreads through a whole generation the fatal poison he imbibed on his father's knee. An English colonist, filled with pity for the Caribbeans, introduces negro slavery into the West Indies,—doing evil that good may come,—and for centuries those fair islands are cursed by his device. Always men perish, but their work remains. As he who scatters thistle-down in a field of wheat does an evil which years may be needed to cure; so every sinner scatters bad seed into a prolific soil. (*b*) Evil tends to permanency, because of the natural corruption of the heart. As acids and alkalis have a mutual affinity, so that they rush together with violence, and can only be separated by force; so is there an affinity between the heart and sin. Hence, when evil is once published there are many ready to embrace it. Certain constitutions of body will take every infectious disease that they approach; and every form of evil finds somewhere a congenial home. This principle is assisted by the solidarity of our race. The whole universe is bound into one system, with a mutual interdependence among all its parts: the meanest and the noblest parts of creation are indissolubly bound together. Especially is this true of man. No man liveth to himself. We are all so closely locked and interlocked together that what affects one affects all. Now if man were not *liable to disease*, or if, being liable, he could *live alone*, there would be no epidemics; so if man were not liable to sin, or if, being liable, he could be set free from his fellow-sinners, evil might soon cease. But as the case is, sin ever tends to spread widely, and to stand permanently.

II. Evil yields before holy self-sacrifice. Esther, having had formerly so free an access and so good success in her appeals, ventures to draw near again. (*a*) Esther was intensely solicitous, for we read, "she wept and besought him." The welfare of the people was dearer to her than her own. The mere dilettante accomplishes nothing, for evil grows naturally; while virtue is like those birds of song which come from afar, are caught with difficulty, and are ever ready to depart. There must be strenuous effort on the part of those who would do good. She wept over temporal ruin; do we weep over spiritual ruin? (*β*) Esther was persistent. She came again. As her former success encouraged her to approach again to an earthly, so our former successes should encourage us to approach the heavenly King. Like the poor widow, men ought always to pray and not to faint. (*γ*) Esther was boldly self-sacrificing. Unbidden she came to the king, bearing her life in her hands. A noble type of the sacrifice and intercession of Christ is presented by this scene in the life of Esther. In entire self-forgetfulness and self-surrender she ventured her life in order to plead

for her kindred; and Christ gave his life that, now within the veil, he might make intercession for his kinsmen after the flesh. (è) Esther succeeded. The king stretched out the golden sceptre. Oh, Esther, thou hast won for ever the gratitude of every Jew. Moses delivered from slavery; thou hast delivered from death! A sword was about to destroy the whole race, and thy fair neck was stretched under to avert the blow! Our Intercessor has equal success. As the wishes of Mordecai were presented by Esther, and she brought back assured safety; so our petitions, poor, babbling cries, are presented by Christ, sprinkled with his own blood, and return to us in showers of blessing.

III. Evil crushed, but not killed. Ahasuerus could only allow Mordecai to invent some contrivance to counteract the evil. To undo the wickedness of Haman seemed impossible, and, to avoid the results of it, the whole empire incurred the risk of civil war. To destroy is always easier than to save; and many a man, who has no hammer for building, has a good torch for burning. As a madman may set on fire a cathedral which a whole generation cannot rebuild, or as a child may tear a painting which only a Raphael could reproduce; so one sin may ruin a soul which only God could save. Partially the effects of sin may be destroyed. The guilty conscience may be set at rest, and the foul heart may be cleansed; the gates of hope may be opened, and those of despair may be shut; but some of the effects endure for ever. A prodigal wastes his estate by intemperance, and it is never restored; a nation is hurried by ambition into unjust war, and is maimed for ever; a suicide takes poison, and has no more opportunity of repentance on earth. The action may be temporary, and the results eternal.

IV. Practical lessons. (α) The folly of infallibility. For either Pope or Kaiser to say, "The thing is settled, and cannot be reconsidered," is to doom the Church or the State to dire disaster. For the imperfect state of man on earth, "live and learn" is a suitable motto. But, like the Bourbons, the kings of Persia learnt nothing and forgot nothing. (β) The power of intercession. Our Lord himself takes a precisely parallel case to that of Esther to teach the efficacy of prayer. As she, in the parable, won by her importunity a blessing from the unwilling, much more may we by our pleading secure the mercy of the ever-willing. Esther's earnestness, her humility, and her self-forgetfulness, teach how to draw near to God. (γ) The awful nature of sin. The actions that are performed the most thoughtlessly may ruin the soul. As one frosty night when the bloom is on the trees may destroy the hopes of spring, as one fierce gale may dash the gallant ship against the rocks; so one sin may ruin the soul. Sickness does not weaken its hold, and death does not destroy its venom. If once the venom is seated in the soul, there is only one healer, and he Almighty, who can wash away the stain.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 3, 4.

Sin never dies of age. It is as when a young man dies in the full fire and strength of his youth by some vehement distemper; it, as it were, tears and forces and fires his soul out of his body. He that will come and fight it out with his corruption to the last shall find that it will sell its life at a dear rate; it will strive and fight for it, and many a doubtful conflict will pass between that and the soul. It may give a man many a wound, many a foil, and many a disheartening blow; for, believe it, the strong man will fight for his possession.—*South.*

My friends, the old statement, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is absolutely true, universally true. The gospel is not its abrogation. It modifies it, gives it a new aspect, in some respects it gives it a new incidence; but be sure of this, that the harvest has to be gathered. If you waste your youth no repentance will send the shadow back upon the dial, or recover the ground lost by idleness, or restore the constitution shattered by dissipation, or give again the resources wasted upon vice, or bring back fleeting opportunities.

If you forget God and live without him in the world, fancying that it is time enough to become "religious" when you "have had your fling,"—even were you to come back at last, and remember how few do,—you could not obliterate the remembrance of misused years, nor the deep marks which they had left upon imagination, and thought, and taste, and habit.—*Maclaren*.

When the king "held out the golden sceptre towards Esther" she was animated with greater confidence, and "stood before him" with touching tenderness, and hearty self-consecration to the cause which she pleaded. She importuned him to issue a new decree, reversing the edict of Haman for the destruction of the Jews—"For how," said she, "can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" Her love for her people was intense, self-sacrificing, and disinterested. She hinged her intercession upon that love. For her own sake did she ask that the lives of her kindred should be spared. In this aspect of it her intercession reminds us of the advocacy and intercession of the Saviour. How vast was his love for his people! Not only did he imperil his life for their sakes, but gave himself "a ransom for many." He intercedes for them in heaven, and is mighty and all-prevailing because that intercession is centred in himself. How could he endure to see those perish for whom he died? and whom, in his exaltation, he ardently loves? If such a contingency could be supposed possible the trial would overwhelm him, and spoil his satisfaction and joy. They are his kindred—his brethren; and in testimony of his love for them, as well as in proof of his ceaseless intercession in their behalf, he appears in the midst of the throne, and of the elders, and of the living ones, "a lamb as it had been slain." How many Jews were there in Persia who knew of the sentence of death which had been passed against them, but who knew not the powerful, loving intercessor whom they had before the king! And there are not a few, even within the enclosure of the Church, who, whilst dreading the

condemnation under which they have been laid by sin, take not home to their hearts the consolation which arises from the intercession of the Saviour. As the appearance of Esther before the king, with her tears and earnest love-pleading, would have sent a thrill of hope throughout millions of hearts in the Persian empire, had it been everywhere visible, so could the sight of Christ before the throne of God be witnessed by faith by all believers, the burden of fear which oppresses many souls throughout the earth would be removed, and there would be the peace and tranquillity of resting in his love. In the survey of our own condition he could not discover any arguments which he could successfully use to secure our forgiveness and final deliverance, but in himself he has all-prevailing pleas. And whilst the believer's prayers derive their power from the concluding words—"For Jesus' sake;" these words receive their confirmation and response in heaven, where Jesus pleads in our behalf for his own name's sake.

"Fair is the lot that's cast for me,
I have an advocate with thee;
And he is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead."
M^cEwen.

Oh queen, thou art victor now! Thou art ascending a higher and a holier throne than that on which thou wast crowned on the day of thine espousals. Thy great king was but now holding forth to thee the golden sceptre on which thy very life was hung, and thou didst arise and stand as a weeping suppliant before him. And lo! now thou art waving a far more powerful sceptre, albeit invisible, over his head! Thou art ruling him partly by the power of womanly beauty and accomplishment over a fitful but susceptible nature, but still more by the irresistible power of moral earnestness, by the grandeur of patriotism, and by the holy spell of self-sacrificing love! And soon the pens of the scribes will be busy for thee, and the swift beasts will be carrying thy message of life to distant provinces, and thy poor people far and near will gratefully bless thy name.—*Radclyffe*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 5, 6.

THE PLEADING OF A GREAT PASSION.

Patriotism is among the noblest and strongest passions of the human heart. This warm and self-forgetting devotion to the claims of our country often very closely resembles the all-reaching love which is produced by Christianity. If, indeed, the Church can boast of martyrs, men who have died rather than deny the truth, every great nation can tell of patriots who chose death rather than the dishonour of their country. In ancient Sparta this passion burned with so hot a flame that mothers rejoiced when their dead but triumphant sons were carried home upon their shields; and a mother was, at least on one great occasion, known to slay her son who had turned coward upon the field of battle. The patriotism of the Jews, being a religious as well as a national sentiment, was peculiarly strong. With the glory of the nation, the success and even the existence of the religion were inextricably involved: if Israel were destroyed, the worship of Jehovah ceased from among men; and if David's line were cut off, the world's Redeemer could never appear. Now, if it was the proudest boast of ancient days to be able to say, "I am a Roman citizen;" and if so many of us would not sell for untold wealth our British birth-right; how much more noble is it to say, "I am a citizen of heaven." The very dust and stones of Zion should be precious in our sight. No sacrifices can be too great which are made for Christ, and no work can be mean which tends toward the extension of his kingdom. The noblest offices of the world are mean and poor beside the humblest duties of the Church. We cannot refrain from a lofty emotion when we remember the glories of our spiritual temple. The temple of Jerusalem has passed away; but the true Zion, of which that was but a type, is established for ever. Now the whole of Esther's life shows that she was under the influence of both the national and the religious sentiments. But perhaps in all the story, her patriotism never shines so beautifully as in this paragraph. All the grace of a tender woman, all the exquisite tact of a woman deeply in earnest, and all the deep pathos of a woman's heart, are richly displayed.

I. A great passion inspires humility. If it please the king, and if the thing seem right before the king. Pride is effaced in the presence of a lofty emotion. That the thing was in itself right she does not venture to assert, but recognizes the supreme power of the Oriental despot. As a mountain torrent, swollen by the winter rains, sweeps away the feeble dykes which were intended to impede its overwhelming progress; so the lofty passion which inspired her heart made Esther oblivious of her own claims upon the king. Lest she should injure her plea, she does not stop to insist upon absolute right; but asks as a favour what might have been demanded as an act of justice. She was the wise counsellor, and Ahasuerus was the fool; and yet she descends even below his level. Yet if her language was becoming in her lips when she addressed only an earthly monarch, much more is such submission suitable on the lips of a Christian. Possibly many an earnest prayer meets with no Divine "I will" in answer, because what ought to have been asked as a favour is demanded almost as a right. Our ignorance, which knows not what is expedient,—our folly, which wishes for injurious comforts,—and our guilt, which takes away all merit from our prayers,—are all arguments for humility. Above all is the example of our Lord, who prayed "Thy will be done."

II. A great passion consecrates personal gifts. "If I be pleasing in his eyes." What treasures of wealth, genius, and affection have been laid on the altar of patriotism! Even for a shilling a day men will be found ready to die rather than submit to the dishonour of their flag. No need to travel back to either Jewish or Roman history for illustrations of the text. The grand valour of the Dutch

in their wars against Spain, or the countless deeds of daring performed on many a desperate field by British troops, show that every generous heart holds the country dearer than the life. Equally wonderful the triumphs of faith! Elliott and Brainard, Martyn and Schwartz, were animated by the same passion for the heavenly that inspired Esther for the earthly kingdom. So the Cobbler of Leicester-shire conquered the difficulties of forty dialects in order that, beneath the shadow of ancient temples or high on the slopes of swelling hills, he might preach Christ to the people of India. So Howard, or Wilberforce, or Livingstone were equally inspired by Christ with the grand enthusiasm of humanity.

III. A great passion creates a delicate tact. "Let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman." Thus, with all a woman's subtle insight into the heart, she does not remind the king of his share in the iniquity; she only speaks of the sin of Haman. A lower level of patriotism might have reproached the king with his own folly; but in her lofty zeal for her people she avoids all manner of reproach. It will be time enough for reproaches when her petition has failed. If the king will not undo the wrong that he has done, then she will cast in her lot with her kindred, and fling the king's favours back in his face. Meanwhile she builds for him a bridge of gold. Many seem more anxious to reprove the sinner than to remove the sin. Accordingly they are full of invective, and the sinner "turns away in a rage." Those who are pleading for Christ need, along with other noble gifts, a delicate tact. It is easy to make the sinner cry, "What! am I to beg and pray like a beaten child? No! Let Divine vengeance fall. Terror shall not make me afraid." And truly if hell were the only motive of the Gospel there would be some reason in the bitter words. But as Esther pleaded delicately for her people, so the preacher should plead wisely for his Master. Men are oftener to be led than driven; as flies are caught by honey rather than by vinegar.

IV. A great passion is called up by a great occasion. "How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people?" It is sometimes said as an objection to Christianity that the Bible does not teach the duty of patriotism. But by example it does. The example of our Lord as he wept over the city is a supreme instance. Here is the example of Esther. (a) Patriotism is a noble sentiment. It arises above the natural selfishness that confines affection in narrow limits, and extends to all the nation. It burns more brightly in a small brave nation than in a vast empire; so Athens, Judea, Montenegro were noted for this virtue. It feeds upon the noble traditions of the past, so that the example of a Washington becomes reproductive. It is injured by party faction, so that a nation torn in two by intestine strife is open to the arts of any invader. Often it is altogether destroyed by the vices of a ruler; thus, it is said that the Moors were introduced into Spain, and the English into Ireland, in order that certain nobles might revenge themselves upon their king. But this virtue never shines so brightly as in days of disaster. Motley's 'History of the Dutch Republic' is a magnificent illustration of this principle. As Macaulay speaks of that stubborn British valour which never shines so brightly as at the close of a long and doubtful day; so true patriotism never flames up so high as when an invader's foot is planted on our shores. Then a patriot may use the language of Pitt—"I would never lay down my arms; never! never! never!" (β) This virtue has corresponding dangers. As humility tends to cowardice, courage to recklessness, liberality to prodigality, so that Aristotle teaches that virtue is always a mean between two extremes; similarly patriotism tends to ostentation, to self-confidence, and injustice. A Roman pardoned any wickedness by which the territory or wealth of Rome was increased; Englishmen condone many a crime because it seems to be for the national advantage. Artifices which would rouse the derision of the whole country if they were to be perpetrated by the French, become sacred as soon as they are practised by statesmen of our own. (γ) Patriotism will some day be merged in a far wider sentiment. As the farmer

sows two kinds of seed in the same field, and when the one which grows more rapidly has ripened and is cut down, then the other more slowly comes to maturity; so amid the thick growth of family and national affection there is slowly developing a far deeper and nobler passion, which will look forward to the day when, in all the earth, there shall be but one nation, whose king is Christ.

V. A great passion does not overlook family affection. "Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" The national sentiment arises first in the family; and as the domestic affections are pure and strong, or corrupt and weak, will be the growth or decline of the nation. In the great days of Rome divorces were unknown for centuries together; and as the family ties relaxed the whole empire became corrupt. As Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; so Esther could not separate herself from her people. The vine which hangs its rich clusters of grapes over some stately palace sends its roots far under the ground to perennial springs of water; and so, while Esther adorned the palace with her beauty, she still felt that she grew up out of a despised race of Jews who usually lived far away from the court. Humanly speaking, her whole virtue sprang from her adherence to her people. Distrust the man who treats lightly the claims of family and home. Family affection is essential to the State, is consecrated by Christianity; and here Esther becomes a type of Him who, though exalted to a nobler throne than that of Shushan, still remembers his kinsmen after the flesh.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5, 6.

1. This petition Esther presents with much affection. She fell down at his feet and besought him with tears: every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. It was time to be earnest when the Church of God lay at stake. Let none be so great as to be unwilling to stoop, none so merry as to be unwilling to weep, when thereby they may do any service to God's Church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people.

2. She expresses it with great submission, and a profound deference to the king, and his wisdom and will. If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight. Even then when we have the clearest reason and justice on our side, and have the clearest cause to plead, yet it becomes us to speak to our superiors with humility and modesty, and not to talk like demandants when we are supplicants. There is nothing lost by decency and good breeding. As soft answers turn away wrath, so soft askings obtain favour.

3. She enforces her petition with a pathetic plea: "For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my

people?" Little comfort can I have of my own life if I cannot prevail for theirs: as good share in the evil myself as see it come upon them; for how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred that are dear to me? Esther, a queen, owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them with a very tender concern. Now it was that she mingled her tears with her words, that she wept and made supplication. We read of no tears when she begged for her own life; but now that she is sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. They that are truly concerned for the public would rather die in the ditch than live to see the desolations of the Church of God and the ruin of their country. Tender spirits cannot bear to hear of the ruin of their people and kindred, and therefore dare not omit any opportunity of giving them relief.—*M. Henry.*

We should have sympathy for the oppressed brethren in the faith (1 Peter iii. 8; Col. iii. 12; Gal. vi. 10). The innocence of the guiltless should be protected (1 Sam. xx. 32). He who has no pity for the pious and innocent when they are in danger is not worthy

of the name of a man, much less that of a Christian ; for we are members of one body (1 Cor. xii. 10).—*Starke*.

She had her life already given her at her petition ; but unless she might have her people at her request, who were sold as well as herself, her life would be unto her a joyless, that is, a lifeless, life. It is rather a death than a life that is spent in heaviness and horror. And this would be Esther's case if her people should be massacred, as was designed and decreed. . . . How can I ? and shall I see ? how should I do otherwise than sink at the sight ? Melancthon said that the good Ecolampadius died of grief for the Church's calamities. Nehemiah was heart-sick for the breaches of Joseph. Moses wished himself expunged, and Paul accursed, rather than it should go ill with God's people.—*Trapp*.

Indeed there is no sublimity of human character to equal that which is reached in such a mood. Take the greatest men who have lived, in their greatest moments, you will find that either they are in this mood or in one not far removed from it. Morally, the grandest act in the life of Moses, to our thinking, is not to be found on the granite peaks of Sinai amid the thunders, and the darkness, and the flames ; nor on Pisgah, with the far-stretching land of promise lying in light before him ; but when grieved, and humbled, and disappointed with the idolatries of the people, and yet clinging passionately to them still, he threw himself before God as their intercessor, crying, " Oh, this people have sinned a great sin ; yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin,—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." If I fail in this I fail in everything. Life itself will hardly be desirable any longer. If this people for whom I have lived is to die, let me die with them, and let us all be forgotten together.

David could sing with loud voice to the praise of God. He could cry to him in the lonely wilderness by night until his voice echoed among the rocks and hills. He could fight at the head of the bravest. He could sometimes

magnanimously spare the life of an enemy, even when, by sacrificing that life, his own advancement would be promoted. But among all the moods of his life, none, probably, is really diviner than that which is expressed in these words, written apparently while his heart was melted, while his tears were flowing,—“ Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.”

St. Paul, often great in this greatness, is never more conspicuously so than when he declares that he has “ great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart,” and that he “ could wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.” Like Esther, his cry is, “ How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred ? ”—only his meaning covers the spiritual and the eternal, Esther's only affecting this time-life.

But the *really perfectly sublime* of this condition or state is found only in the Master, who not only wished and desired the good of all, and lived promoting it, but actually died for us ; gave life for life, the just for the unjust—redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us. Oh for a love of race-kindred like that of Esther ; for a love of country like that of David ; for a love of souls like that of Christ!—*Raleigh*.

It was with great earnestness and evident marks of affection that Esther urged the king to interpose his authority to prevent the execution of the bloody decree. “ She fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears.” We have here a bright example of female patriotism. At her first appearance we read of nothing of this kind. Then she was a party concerned,—and, with the dignity which became a queen, and one of an injured and innocent race, she pled her cause, and boldly arraigned the enemy and adversary. But now, her own life having been secured, she appears as an intercessor and advocate for others. Her whole soul was embarked in the cause which she had undertaken—very different from a man of law, or one who engages to act the part of his client for

fee and reward. She "preferred Jerusalem above her chief joy." When her own life was in danger she bent no knee, she shed no tear; but now she weeps and makes supplication, and refuses to rise from the ground unless her people are given at her request. To obtain this there is no humiliation to which she will not submit, no entreaty that she will not employ. She will not separate herself from her kindred, and, like the wife of Phinehas,* cannot think of surviving the destruction of her people. "For how," she exclaims, "can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people, or how shall I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

The true patriot is ready to sacrifice everything for the public weal; he prefers public to personal interests, and would rather die than witness the desolations of the church of God and the ruin of his country. Such was the patriotism of Moses:—"Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."† And such was the patriotism of the New Testament Moses, the Apostle Paul: "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh;"‡—a passage, the beauty of which is not half seen unless it is compared with the close of the preceding chapter, in which we find the Apostle exulting in the love of God, and declaring his persuasion that nothing could separate him from Christ. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." But what all these things could not do, singly or together, his love for his brethren would have induced him to undergo. "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ (separated from his love)

for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."—*McClure*.

At no time was Esther more beautiful than when, with tearful eye, at the king's feet, she besought him to pity her brethren. And no prayer of yours will be wafted more acceptably to the heavenly throne than that which, with thankfulness for good you have yourselves received, and pressing, tender desire for the good of others, you present for the salvation of those who will not and cannot pray for themselves.—*Davidson*.

It is a good sign, when we feel an interest in the welfare of those related to us, and when we can with importunity invoke the blessings of God upon them. Thus did Esther. She was not more earnest for herself than for her people. Thus did Jeremiah. "Oh that mine eyes were fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of my people." Thus felt Jesus. "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and *wept* over it." Thus felt St. Paul. He poured out his very soul for his people, the Jews, though they persecuted him, and tried to effect his destruction. He tells us, that he "had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart" at their folly and wickedness in rejecting Christ, and that his "heart's desire and prayer unto God for them was, that they might be saved."

Brethren, are we thus minded? Esther fell down at the king's feet for her people. Have you done so for your relatives and friends? She wept at the *temporal* ruin which was coming upon them. Have you wept at the *eternal* ruin to which your unbelieving friends are exposed? She said, "How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" Have you said, "My parents are dark and careless, Oh what heaviness I have in my heart on account of their spiritual indifference! My children give no signs of grace. They 'remember not their Creator in the days of their youth,' all remonstrances, admonitions, and persuasions are lost upon them. They *will* have their own way,—'How can I endure the destruction of my children?' Lord, enlighten them; Lord,

* 1 Sam. iv. 19. † Exod. xxxii. 32.

‡ Rom. ix. 1—3.

arrest them in their career of sin and folly. Make them, like Obadiah, 'to fear God from their youth.' Deliver them from youthful follies and vanities.

Bring them to the Saviour, that they may be among thy ransomed ones for ever. 'Oh that' my children 'might live before thee!'—*Hughes*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 7, 8.

A MONARCH'S IMBECILITY.

Weak men usually trust to cunning. The lion leaps straight upon its enemy, but the fox has recourse to trick; and so the strong man, who knows his own purpose, boldly faces obstacles; while the weak employ indirect courses. Even an open lie may betray less feebleness of character than the mean evasions to which some men have resort. The one bespeaks a bold bad man, the other reveals a cowardly bad man. As a known enemy is always preferable to a treacherous ally; so the strong but wicked man is to be preferred to the weakling. The great qualities which the former will be likely to possess may win admiration; but the latter will be only despised. The fact is, that the weaker man is at heart as false as the other, but has not the courage to sin boldly. He therefore tries to cheat both God and the devil. The weakness of a weak man is never seen so clearly as after he has committed some palpable error. He does not manfully confess his mistake, but twists and shuffles till he persuades himself that his error was, at worst, a matter of necessity. Always distrust the man who is the *victim of circumstances*. Great men make their circumstances, and little men are made by them. Not unfrequently the path to heaven seems to lead only to a choice of difficulties. Our corrupt hearts and emasculated wills declare that virtue is impossible, and that the only path open to us is one that leads through transgression. When the tradesman smooths over a palpable dishonesty by speaking of the necessities of trade; or when, in times of persecution, the timid confessor throws the incense upon the impious altars of idolatry; they are always ready to excuse the enormity of their sin by the force of the temptation: that is, they say they are tempted of God. But no circumstances can make the good man sin, or the really strong man bend. If, then, we have done evil, let us take our own share of the blame, and not cast it upon our circumstances. Yet circumstances usually make a second sin easier than the first. In that downward path each step is accompanied by an increasing impetus; and thus sins of an enormity to shock the inexperienced become easily possible when other sins have prepared the way. As an army that is once beaten becomes by that very fact more likely to be defeated again, so a man who has once been mastered by temptation will be all the more likely to yield when next he is assailed. Thus Ahasuerus finds that his wicked compliance with Haman has enwrapped him in difficulty. A good man could never have fallen so low; a wise man could never have been so foolish; and a strong man could never have descended to such a monstrous device. He was unable to resist the pleading of Esther; and therefore his course was boldly to disavow his infallibility. Let him convene an assembly of notables, manfully confess his error, and henceforth declare that the laws of Persia could be altered. But this was too brave a course. To confess an error would shake the national respect for authority. He therefore pleads his circumstances, and rather than acknowledge an error, plunges the whole empire in danger of civil war. Even this responsibility he does not fully assume. The weakling throws upon Mordecai the duty of contriving a remedy against his own mistakes.

I. A weak man's self-defence. "I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hands upon the Jews." Even if the whole race of the Hebrews perish, the king had proved his affection

for Esther by endowing her with the wealth, and sacrificing to her the life, of her enemy. Wonderful devotion ! He had given what cost him nothing ; he had hanged a man of an alien race ! Surely these Oriental monarchs prove that "lust dwells hard by hate." His love for Esther was simply a passion which had not yet spent its novel force ; and her beauty was rewarded by the life of her foe. Ahasuerus was unworthy of his queenly wife. She is inspired with profound tenderness for her people ; and he appeases her patriotism by the execution of a foe. Yet what would the wealth of Haman benefit Esther when her heart was broken for her murdered kinsmen ? There are griefs which wealth cannot solace, and which vengeance cannot forget. Better a thousand Hamans alive than one Jew murdered. Yet, clearly, the monarch fancies that Esther will pardon the edict which he has signed because of the punishment which he has meted out. He sees that he has exposed himself to the hatred and contempt of his fair wife by yielding to the devices of Haman, and therefore he offers her the life of her enemy as a proof of his devotion. How much nobler had he said, "Oh, queen, I have weakly allowed myself to be led to the verge of a great wickedness ; now that my eyes are open to my folly, I must in some way reverse the decree." But he was too weak. With a maudlin tenderness, like that of a drunken man, while she is inspired with an almost Divine passion of patriotism, he pleads his affection for her person. Surely Esther despised him in her heart. As if it was so easy to forget that he had agreed to murder all her race. Thus we have a great wickedness and a small propitiation. As if the hero of one hundred swindles flung a copper to a beggar ; as if a cowardly murderer gave a crust to his victim's orphan ; as if a life-long sinner offered to God the compensation of a Sunday prayer ; so Ahasuerus hopes that Haman's death will make Esther unmindful of the wickedness devised against her kindred.

II. A weak man's "non possumus." "That which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, may no man reverse." What I have written I have written. Rulers too often say, "Thus I order ; let my will stand instead of a reason." Weakness and folly usually turn to obstinacy. He who is easily imposed upon at last takes a determined stand, and usually takes it in the wrong place. The determination of the wise is no way to be feared, for they will yield to right reason ; but it requires a surgical operation to make an argument penetrate to the brain of a fool : hence the fool is obstinate, because he cannot understand. States also which take an immovable stand upon the "wisdom of our ancestors" are in a fair way to ruin. Time is the great innovator, and therefore lapse of time brings vast changes into the body politic ; and hence "he that will not apply new remedies, must expect new diseases." So science continually takes new departures ; and he who rested in the discoveries of a previous generation, would be the laughing-stock of his own. There is but one unchanging truth,—the revelation of Jesus Christ,—and even that assumes varying aspects. As the sun now draws near and now departs, now is glorious in mid-day, and yet soon leaves us in darkness, while still himself unchanged and, as far as our earth is concerned, unmoved, so our holy religion is compelled to vary with the varying aspects of the times. Only the fool never learns wisdom. So Ahasuerus says, "Take it not amiss that I do not reverse the decree of Haman, for the king's writing stands unaltered for ever."

III. A weak man's refusal of responsibility. "Write ye also for the Jews as it liketh you in the king's name." Having done the mischief, he commits to Mordecai the work of undoing it. Ahasuerus had already had proof of the folly of committing his power to the hands of his minister ; but even experience will not make fools wise ; he now trusts equal power to Mordecai. Doubtless the king was right in thus committing himself to the skill and loyalty of the new minister ; doubtless, also, this minister did the best possible for him to do in the circumstances ; but if the king had bestirred himself in a true kingly manner, as already suggested, it would not have been necessary to deluge the land with blood. Few evils are more ruinous to a State than the dread of responsibility. It leads speedily

to anarchy. A monarch who never decides, a general who fears to take prompt and vigorous action, a statesman who dares not step beyond the line of musty precedent, are greater curses to a land than even open wickedness. In this world folly and weakness are often punished more severely than sin.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7, 8.

Ver. 7. *Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews.*

The king could not grant to Esther everything that she requested. But he assures her, that it was not for want of good will either to herself or to her people that he did not in direct terms reverse the decree procured by Haman. His love to Esther appeared in the rich present of the confiscated estate of Haman. His good wishes to her people appeared in the ignominious death of their capital enemy. But kings cannot do everything. The most noble and potent prince in the world had not the power of rescinding his own decrees, however desirous he might be of undoing foolish things done by himself.

Ver. 8. *Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.* The king himself could not reverse it; and therefore we find that Darius the Mede laboured in vain till the going down of the sun to save Daniel from the lions' den, and passed a miserable sleepless night in the anguish of a fruitless repentance for passing a mischievous law, which he could not abolish. The Persians thought their kings highly honoured in that their decrees were inviolable. But this honour, like some others enjoyed by absolute princes, was a burden too heavy to be borne by mortals. It precluded them from the comforts of repentance, too often necessary for vain men, who, though they would be wise, are born like the wild ass's colt.

The king, therefore, could not give Esther and Mordecai a warrant to pass

an act rescissory of his own decrees against the Jews. But he allows them to frame a decree in his name, and to seal it with his ring, for counteracting its effects. As the first decree retained its force, the king could not legally punish those wicked enemies of the Jews, who might take the advantage of it to gratify their malice. Their murders were already legalized by a decree that could not be altered. But a law for the protection of the Jews, which did not rescind the former, might possibly be devised by the wisdom of Mordecai; and to establish such a law the king gave him his ring. He had been too ready on the former occasion to lend his authority; but now he commits it to a safe hand, and under necessary restrictions. He gave his ring to Haman to seal a bloody decree; he now gives it to Mordecai to seal a just and necessary decree for the preservation of many precious lives. The inviolability of the king's decrees, which gave him so much trouble by guarding the wicked laws procured by Haman, would guard the intended decree from violation.—*Lawson.*

It was a fundamental article in the constitution of Persia, that a law once enacted was irrevocable. A most preposterous provision! and worse than preposterous—irrational and unrighteous. Of all the absurdities into which nations have fallen in their systems of legislation, especially where the power is entrusted to the arbitrary will and caprice of a single individual, this is the most absurd—giving perpetuity and effect to every species of injustice and oppression and cruelty, proceeding on the presumptuous assumption of infallibility, and arrogating the right which belongs exclusively to the Supreme Being, who cannot do wrong, all whose enactments are necessarily founded in

truth and rectitude, and "the righteousness of whose testimonies is everlasting." This arrogance of the Persian despots has never been equalled, except by the claim to infallibility set up by "the man of sin, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." No human authority, civil or sacred, whether exercised singly or collectively, is free from error, and consequently its decisions and enactments must always be subject to review and reversal. Some laws may be morally unalterable, in consequence of their being founded on the eternal principles of rectitude and justice, so that the repeal of them would be unjust and morally wrong; but this does not belong to them simply as human laws, with respect to all of which the maxim of our law holds good—the legislature which enacts can annul.—*McCrie*.

The absurdity of the Persian law, that a decree once passed was unrepeatable, has been often commented upon. It has been said that it was the assumption of a prerogative which was to be exercised by God only, and that it rests with him alone to say what can never be altered. But whilst this is true on the side of the Divine infallibility, we have instances in which God provides for the reversal of his threatening and solemn affirmation, when the people, against whom these are made, change in their relation and conduct towards himself. Nineveh was to be destroyed in forty days from the time that the prophet uttered the proclamation in its streets; but when the inhabitants bowed themselves to the earth in deep penitence and humility, the time was allowed to expire without the judgment having been inflicted. But the law of Persia would not have permitted even of this suspended action. It took no account of altered circumstances. By his own act

the king rendered himself helpless to defend those who might, as in the case of the Jews, have been hastily and rashly condemned to death. No allowance was made for mistakes in judgment, inadvertence, or what might turn out to be bad legislation. Besides the presumption involved in such a law, as though the king could do no wrong, it must often have led to great injustice and cruelty. What, for example, was Artaxerxes now to do? He would gladly have yielded to Esther's pleading. He clearly apprehended the unrighteousness of the decree which had been issued, and could not fail to look with dismay on the consequences which would result from its being carried into effect. Nevertheless, all that he could do in the face of this pretentious and foolish law was to leave the matter in the hands of Mordecai and Esther to make another edict "as it liketh you," which might not cancel the former one, however much it should have this design, and which, when passed, would be equally irreversible.—*McEwen*.

For ill to man's nature, as it stands perverted, hath a natural motion strongest in continuance; but good, as a forced motion strongest at first. Surely every medicine is an innovation, and he that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils; for time is the greatest innovator; and if time of course alter things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel do not alter them to the better, what shall be the end?—*Bacon*.

The greatest tyranny that ever was invented in the world is the pretence of infallibility, for Dionysius and Phalaris did leave the mind free, pretending only to dispose of body and goods according to their will; but the Pope, not content to make us do and say what he pleaseth, will have us also to think so, denouncing his imprecations and spiritual menaces if we do not.—*Isaac Barrow*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 9—14.

EVIL COUNTERACTED.

In the conduct of life wisdom is often as necessary as virtue ; hence our Lord commands his followers to be wise as serpents, while they are harmless as doves. Indeed folly will ruin an earthly career as effectually as vice. Thus to have a good cause, and to fight manfully for it, are not sufficient in any conflict : the general needs skill in the arrangement of his troops, and also a sharp eye to discern his enemy's mistakes. Equally in the battle of life we need the open eye, as well as the strong hand, or the brave heart. It is only folly which says, that, as God is righteous, and must therefore be on the side of the righteous, righteousness alone is necessary for success. This may be true on that large scale which takes eternity into the account, but here upon earth it is not true. As our supreme Judge requires at our hands the cultivation of the intellectual as well as of the moral attributes of our nature, he wisely makes much of our earthly success dependent on our skill. Thus a righteous imbecile will often fail, where a skilful scoundrel succeeds. In the case of nations this principle is even more conspicuous. Nations have no hereafter. They are judged here and now. An individual may be righteous and miserable ; but a nation must be exalted by virtue. So manifestly is this principle written on the pages of history, that one of the leading philosophers of our century does not scruple to write, "The cause which succeeds is that which has deserved to succeed." It follows, that in matters of legislation wisdom and righteousness are almost synonymous ; but if we could imagine a ruler who was himself utterly immoral, while yet his large intellect guided him wisely in national affairs, such a monster would yet prove a blessing to his country. At times, however, the folly and wickedness of the legislature are equally conspicuous. When most European nations oppressed the Jews ; when Spain so cruelly drove out the industrious Moors ; or when France expelled those Huguenots who were the very brain and heart of her middle classes, it seems wonderful that no one propagated the maxim, that "What is morally wrong can never be politically expedient." In times like these a statesman who is both wise and righteous finds a noble opportunity. It is for him to resist the passions of the mob, to devise means whereby the oppressed may be relieved, and to open a highway leading to the fair fields of national greatness. Such was the work now committed to Mordecai. It was his part to undo the folly of the monarch and the wickedness of the minister. Ahasuerus committed to him the task of reversing the mischief devised by Haman the Agagite.

I. A sudden decree. The right of self-defence, which in some aspects of it may be called a sacred inheritance, is generally held in abeyance in civilized states. If every man defended himself from attack, and was the avenger of his own wrongs, society would become impossible. This right is usually yielded up to the government ; yet there are always extreme cases, in which this right reverts back to the original owner. So the laws allow of homicide when a burglar, within the house at night, threatens the life of a peaceful inhabitant ; or if a traveller, assailed by a garotter, with the first weapon which comes to hand inflicts a fatal wound, he would usually be held guiltless. In England homicide is said to be justifiable : (a) To prevent the commission of a crime which, when committed, would be punishable with death ; and also (β) In necessary endeavours to carry the law into execution, as in suppressing riots, or apprehending malefactors. Probably, also, the defence of chastity, which approaches nearest to the preservation of life, would be held to justify the same extremities. Now with men of a western race, at least with men of the brave Teutonic stock, there would be no need to say to those

whose lives were assailed that they might defend their right to live. Possibly, however, with sleepy Orientals, oppressed with a sense of the magnitude of the empire, there might be some occasion for a stirring decree. Remembering how cheaply men will sell their lives in China, it seems not improbable that the sentence of Haman would strike the Jews into a dull stupor, from which they needed to be aroused. Yet the decree granted much more than this. It gave first the right of association. When the Jews banded together in armed companies, no heathen ruler of a province could compel them to disarm. Hence, when the fatal day arrived they were ready for their foes. History records, that after the Huguenots had met their foes in battle on many a hard-fought field, they fell a prey to secret and solitary assassination: thus the grand old Coligni, who had no equal on the field, was ruthlessly murdered in his own chamber. From this danger the Jews were delivered. Thanks to the decree, on the thirteenth day of Adar the Jews were able to say to their foes, the motto of the Napiers, "Ready, ay, Ready." Then, secondly, the decree was an act of indemnification. No Jew, who slew his foe in self-defence, need fear that he would have to give an account in the courts of justice. Those who were killed were beforehand pronounced justly killed. There was also a third result doubtless contemplated by Mordecai. No one would die who did not deserve to die, because, after this decree, no one would attack the Jews who was not madly animated with the love of blood and plunder. Orderly citizens would keep the peace; but the sequel shows how terribly Haman had aroused the passions of the mob. No foe so terrible as an excited mob; it resembles that herd of swine possessed by the unclean spirit. One passion, one soul, one wild spirit seems to animate the mass; and the vile mobs of Persia rushed violently upon their own ruin.

II. A royal sanction. Even in the records of Oriental imbecility, it may be doubted whether ever monarch betrayed more besotted folly. How different the records of the East, where one benevolent imbecile succeeds to another bloated sensualist, from the picture painted by our poet Laureate. He tells how statesmen knew how to make the bounds of freedom wider yet, by shaping some august decree, and how freedom widened slowly down from precedent to precedent. Oriental despotism is a pyramid on its apex. As if the monarch were some Epicurean deity, who was wrapt up in selfishness, but could curse all mankind, the whole multitude of the nation living for his glory or for his luxury. In a lively apologue, a domestic bird moralizes on his own importance. For him suns rise and set; for him tides ebb and flow; to provide for his comfort the race of men exist; and thus the whole universe is employed catering for the happiness of one exalted goose. So Oriental monarchs fancy that they are the world. But the theory that the world is governed by kings and statesmen begins to fade away. The country belongs to the people who have made it, and not to the monarch who has been accidentally uplifted above his fellows. Every child has a right to happiness; has a right to an education; has a right to that career which suits his talents; and has a right to a voice in the affairs of state. The state is the private property, the exclusive manor, of no class of men whatever; and the world will not be at rest till this principle is everywhere confessed. Again, also, we must raise our cry against the folly which will not confess a mistake. Not to sin is the noblest lot; and next to that, whether for a nation or a man, is the bold virtue which dares to make restitution. Having taken a wrong position, Christianity demands that we retreat from it as soon as the mistake is discovered.

III. Swift messengers. Bad news proverbially travels fast; and so it is related that, after the Indian Mutiny, long before the tidings could possibly have reached England, strange rumours were current in London—rumours, alas, far surpassed by the real truth. Here good news travels fast, being hastened by the king's commandment. The haste was demanded (a) in order to relieve the suspense of the Jews. Suspense paralyzes all exertion, and indeed a stunning defeat may be less

injurious than long-continued anxiety. To the Jews these tidings would come like cold waters to the thirsty soul. When a vessel has been long becalmed beneath a sultry sky, when the slimy ocean has grown stagnant, and when no evening dews moisten the cracking timbers; or when the travellers of the desert have long been lost, when the cheeks are sunken, and the lips blackened by the continued thirst; let a cloud arise, and streams of rain descend, then men realize the sweetness of good news from a far country. Now, over all that mighty empire the Jew would see that God had not forgotten his covenant, but that he was still mindful of his chosen people Israel. From the banks of India's mighty rivers, away across the deserts as far as the mountains of Rasselas, the cry would be heard, When the Lord turned again the captivity of Israel, we were like them that dream. Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them, whereof they are glad. (β) This haste was required in order that the Jews might have full time to prepare. Lest the first decree should take effect, the people must have opportunity to concert schemes of self-defence. In the presence of so overwhelming a disaster as that with which they were threatened, solitary effort availed nothing. Union alone was strength. (γ) This haste also was a merciful warning to all the heathen. Before they were fairly aroused by the messengers of Haman they were admonished by the decree of Mordecai. To the more distant provinces we can fancy the messengers of mercy speeding onward, if haply they may overtake and pass by the messengers of death. So England to-day in her right hand carries to China the deadly opium, and then sends afterward swift messengers of mercy to preach the Gospel. Possibly, in the eyes of the all-wise God the folly of Ahasuerus, perched on his infallibility, is no greater than the folly of Britain murdering a whole empire for the sake of revenue. At least we may pray that the messengers of the modern Mordecai may undo the evil devised by the modern Haman.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 9—14.

Now in the change wrought in Providence on the condition of the Jews, as well as in the work which was yet imposed upon them before they could deliver themselves from their enemies and establish themselves in the enjoyment of their own liberties and privileges, we have an illustration of God's working *in grace*. He accomplishes for us in his grace what we could not do for ourselves. The Jews scattered throughout the Persian empire had no part in securing this second decree of the king. Though they had loudly protested against the cruel wrong which was being done to themselves and their families, yet would it all have gone for nothing; and had not the second decree been passed, apart altogether from their interference, they should all have perished when the day fixed had arrived. It came to them not as an achievement of their own, but simply as a gift. Whilst, however, it threw around them the favour and protection of the king, and did for them what they could not have

done for themselves, yet had they to confront and beat down all the enemies who should rise up against them, and virtually gain a victory for themselves. They had to fight in the king's name, and with the king's weapons, and under the king's mandate. The conquest was sure, but the battle might yet be severe. In like manner has God done for us, in Christ, what we could never have done for ourselves. We have in him pardon, reconciliation, and unmerited grace. We have in him the victory. But still have we to "fight the good fight of faith," and to battle against every enemy who should seek our soul's ruin. If it had not been for our deed of emancipation and salvation accomplished for us by Christ, when we were ignorant of it, and could have done nothing to forward or finish it, we should never have striven against our enemies, or had only struggled in vain. But on account of what has been done for us we have to be ready against our evil day, to be equipped in the armour of God, and to contend

against our enemies in the King's name and by his authority. There is not an evil passion or lust against which we are not called upon to do battle, not a temptation which we are not commanded to resist, not a spiritual adversary which we are not required to put forth all our energies to overcome. In our "evil day" we are summoned by our King to "stand for our lives," and be prepared to war against our enemies as though the victory lay with ourselves. God helping us, we will do it! The issues are tremendous. The contention is not simply for the life of the body, but of the soul. Against our immortal life is every fiery dart levelled. The spoil which they would take from us is nothing short of our faith and hope in God, our security in Christ and preparedness for heaven. Let the people of God be always apprehensive of the "evil day," and be ready on the instant to "stand for their lives." The victory is theirs if they will only earnestly contend for it. Yield not an inch of ground. "No mercy!" is the war-cry of the foe. Man, woman, little ones, and spoil, must all be taken. "No surrender!" be our war-cry in reply. Everything saved, nothing lost. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."—*McEuen*.

"The posts were hastened by the king's commandment."—He was now made sensible of the great wrong he had done to the Jews, and made all possible haste to undo, as far as he could undo, what he had done. Are you sensible you have done wrong? Make haste, and delay not to repair the wrong, if it is in your power. How can you say that you repent of the evil that you have done, if you hold it fast? The light of nature teaches men that they ought, with the first opportunity, to put away the evil of their doings, and to redress the injuries done by their hands, or their tongues, or their pens. As soon as Jesus brought salvation to the house of Zachæus, he said, "Lord, if I have wronged any man by false accusation, I

restore him four-fold." Is it your intention, in some future part of your life, to compensate the wrongs you have done in the former part of it? But are you sure that you shall see another week, or even another day? Boast not thyself of to-morrow, unless a prophet of as much credit as Isaiah has brought a message from God, that some more years of life are allotted you.—*Lauson*.

The decree was given in the month Sevan, "the month of May," says an old author, "when all things are in their prime and pride, and the earth chequered and entrained with variety of flowers, and God is seen to be *magnus in minimis*—great in the smallest creatures. Then did the Sun of righteousness arise to these afflicted exiles with healing in his wings, like as the sunbeams did to the dry and cold earth, calling out the herbs and flowers, and healing those deformities that winter had brought upon it."—*Quoted by Dr. Raleigh*.

If such anxiety was manifested for this newly-enacted law to be known throughout the empire, how much more anxious should we be to circulate the word of God throughout the world? If it was deemed so important that the Jews should know that they were allowed to withstand their enemies, how much more so is it that mankind should be informed of the strength and craftiness of their spiritual adversaries, of the armour with which they are to be clothed, and of the great Captain of salvation, under whose banners they shall crush them all, and enjoy the fruits of victory in the kingdom of heaven for ever! And if it was deemed of such moment that the decree should be "written unto every people, after their language," how should we rejoice that the great charter of salvation has been translated into so many of the languages of the earth, and that a copy of the Scriptures goeth forth into distant parts of the world for every moment that passeth away! May these Divine writings be blessed to the hastening of the reign of Christ, "from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same!"—*Hughes*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 15—17.

DAYS OF REJOICING.

AFTER a dark and stormy night, when the clouds have hidden every star, and the fierce winds have been howling over hill and dale, what gladness fills all animated nature as the sun arises in the East. He floods the valleys with his cheerful light, and kindles a blaze of glory upon the mountain-tops. Then the thief and assassin, with every unclean and loathsome creature, seek their hiding-place; then the honest artisan goes forth to his task until the evening; and then sweet concerts are heard in every grove. So after the days of national gloom came the morning of gladness to the Jews. Man's extremity once again proved to be God's opportunity. As when the breath of heaven sweeps onward through the open sky, and meets there with an easy reception, it creates little commotion; but when it meets the strength of a forest, the same wind grows mighty, and dwells there till it compels the tall trees to bow, and yield a triumphant passage over the top of all their glories. So in days of quiet, men pass easily along, and are barely conscious of the presence of God; but when affliction or persecution ariseth because of the Word, then God wonderfully interferes to save his chosen people, and even his foes are constrained to cry, "Galilean, thou hast conquered." So had Jehovah vindicated the rights of his people, and compelled even the heathen to acknowledge that his ways were wonderful. Days can never be so dark but that the sun may burst through the cloud; our difficulties can never be so great but that our Master can lift us above them all; and often "where sin has made a difficulty, grace has made a triumph." Now Haman's devices end in the exaltation of Mordecai, and the threatened destruction of the Jews leads directly to the enlargement of their nation.

I. Honour paid to a wise minister. The once despised Mordecai now issues from the palace clothed in royal apparel, and wearing a crown of gold. It is not always that a wise minister wins national honour. Every age has seen examples of great statesmen hurled from power by the vices of the great, or by the folly of the crowd. But happy is that country in which the poor wise man is not despised. (α) Such a man, placed at the head of the state, will not be blinded by personal vices. Frequently the dearest interests of a nation have been sacrificed to the luxury of the minister; but a man of virtue will always be on the watch for opportunities to serve his generation. (β) A great statesman, again, will not be biassed by selfish motives. To increase his own wealth or prestige, to promote the prosperity of family or party, or to injure the power of a rival, are desires never cherished in such a breast. It should be easier to turn the sun from his path than a statesman from the path of duty. (γ) A great statesman will recognize the supremacy of virtue. The will of God is his supreme law, and his final reward is the approval of that unseen Master. (δ) A great minister, once more, will live for the welfare of others. To raise the fallen, to vindicate the oppressed, to afford an asylum to the slave, to increase the food of the poor, to care for the education of the child, and to promote the glory of God—such is the noble vocation of a truly wise minister of state.

II. A nation rejoicing under the good minister's shadow. "The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honour." The Jews had (α) the joy of deliverance. The poet Spenser writes:—

Ease after war, port after stormy seas,
Rest after toil, death after life, doth greatly please.

So there is always joy in a sudden change from danger to safety. As a gentle mother prepares pleasant surprises for her child, so God's providence frequently

delights his people with a sudden change of prospect; and he who was in darkness now finds the light doubly precious. There was also (β) the joy of safety. The danger was not only postponed, but removed. Hitherto they had lived as strangers in a strange land, liable at any time to plots like those of Haman. Such has been the history of the Jews in every nation under heaven. Now, at least for a time, they were safe under the shadow of Esther the queen, and Mordecai the statesman. Every history tells how the liability to a crushing disaster unsettles the morals of a people, and drives men headlong into vice. Every man knows, also, from his own experience, how completely a sense of insecurity detracts from happiness. Hitherto the Jews had been like a man stood on a narrow plank over a yawning chasm. A false step, a sudden breeze, or a weak spot in the board, will precipitate him into the abyss. But now the Jews were standing on a massive rock, and were able to look back on the danger from which they were escaped. (γ) They had also the joy and honour of large accessions. A man's faith redoubles in intensity when he can persuade others to believe it; and the Jews' confidence in their national glory would wonderfully increase when they saw the heathen offering themselves as converts to the true faith.

III. The triumph of religion. "Many of the people of the land became Jews." So always wise rulers may be as nursing fathers to the Church. Multitudes are led by the example of the great; many may be only influenced by the desire for worldly prosperity, and some will be genuine converts. Without the imputation of any sinister motives, two valid reasons can be assigned for this sudden development of Judaism. (α) Many are influenced only by visible signs. Now this wonderful interposition of providence on behalf of the Jews would be to many a sufficient proof that God was on their side. (β) Others, of a nobler sort, might first hear of Judaism as a power in the State through the very tumults excited by Haman. They would then inquire into the history and claims of this strange religion, and become convinced of its truth. Thus the wrath of man is made to praise God.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 15—17.

This narrative may teach us that in the darkest and most unpromising circumstances there is nearly always *some* way of relief and improvement. How seldom are things so in human life that literally nothing can be done! There is *something* unrepealable in all important human action. But there is also much that may be practically repealed. I think we may say that never, at any one time, in the history of a nation; never, in the life of an individual, are things so dark and bad that nothing can be done to amend and lighten them. On the contrary, this world, and the social and individual spheres of it, this whole mundane system, is constructed on the plan, so to say, of admitting, suggesting, prompting to, and furnishing, the means of continual recovery.

If this were not so, the world would soon be full of the most pitiable spectacles that could be conceived; commu-

nities and individuals sitting hopelessly amid the gloom of their own failures, amid the consequences of their own mistakes, amid the deepening unhappiness arising from the memory of their own sins—the strokes of penalty heard resounding on every side, the waters of misery rising silently and coldly within, while the long night of despair is deepening and settling without. Such pictures are not to be seen. There is indeed much suffering in the world; some of it penalty, and much of it not. And there are all kinds of calamities, and mischances, and unexpected and unsuspected griefs, and things that ought never to have happened, and things which fill you with sympathy, and pain, and profound regret, and perhaps indignation, as soon as you know them. And there are many mournful people who make the worst of them; or shall we say the best of them, for they really

seem to find a kind of dismal enjoyment in seeing how bad they are, and in anticipating that they are going to be still worse.

But who knows not, also, that calamities and misfortunes are retrieved, that injuries are redressed, that mistakes are rectified? Who knows not that oppressions come to an end, and bloody wars, and other evil works? Yes, and those things are accomplished sometimes just when everything appears almost hopeless, and by means which do not seem at all sufficient or equal to the end.—*Raleigh.*

The joy felt by the Jews was greatly enhanced by the distress into which they had lately been plunged, and by the suddenness and strangeness of the transition. They felt like a sick man at the point of death, when he hears the voice, Deliver from going down to the pit; or like a criminal expecting the hour of his execution, when a pardon is put into his hand. They felt like their fathers when the Lord turned back the captivity of Zion; "they were like them that dream; their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing." And such, my friends, will be the feelings of the ransomed of the Lord, when they shall come to the heavenly Zion; the recollection of all that they have suffered here shall only serve to accent their happiness, and convert it into a joy unspeakable and full of glory. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

The deliverances experienced in time by the Church and people of Jehovah are earnest of that felicity and glory which shall be enjoyed in the future world. But they are also productive of benefits in this life, which make them sources of joy and thanksgiving to all well-affected minds. Besides confirming weak disciples, and adding alacrity to the strong, they are often blessed for making converts, and inducing strangers to join themselves to the people of God.

Thus it is written, "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."*

These promises were partly fulfilled in consequence of the visible interposition of Divine providence, on the occasion referred to in the text. "Many of the people of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." They became proselytes to the Jewish religion (for no other meaning can be applied to the words, when the Jews were foreigners), renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God. "When the Church prospers, and is smiled upon," says a pious commentator, "many will come into it that will be shy of it when it is in trouble." But we must not altogether despise such conversions. Though nothing but willing and cordial submission will advantage the souls of individuals, God can glorify himself, and Christ is glorified in the "professed subjection" of men. "Thou hast delivered me from the strivings of the people; and thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me;" or, as it is in the margin, "shall yield feigned obedience unto me."† Not fear, but love, is the principle of genuine and evangelical obedience. But the Spirit of God makes use of the natural principle of fear, in awakening persons to a concern about salvation. "Save yourselves from this untoward generation," was an apostolical exhortation; and among the effects produced by the preaching and miracles of the primitive Church, this is particularly specified, that "fear came upon every soul;" and again, "great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things;" after which it follows, "and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." Amen.—*McCrie.*

Who could have believed that the

* Isa. xiv. 1.

† Ps. xviii. 43, 44.

contrivances of Haman for the destruction of the Jews would have terminated in the increase of their nation? The lovers of the name of the God of Israel would tremble at Haman's devices, lest the name of Israel should be put out, and the worship of the God of Israel should be extirpated from the earth. But the revolution of a few weeks convinced them that their God was the same God that he had ever been; and that wherein his enemies dealt proudly, he was still above them. Death and destruction are in the hand of the Lord, and he can make them instrumental for the life, and for bringing about the safety, of his people. "Before him darkness becomes light, and sorrow is turned into joy. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and carrieth the devices of the froward headlong. So the poor have hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth."—*Laurson*.

And many of the people of the land became Jews.—That is, they were proselyted, professing the Jewish religion, and siding with them; some in sincerity, doubtless, and some out of sinisterity, and for self-respects, because they saw

the king favoured them, the queen and Mordecai were altogether with them and for them. So that mixed multitude (Exod. xii. 38), moved with miracles, removed out of Egypt with the Israelites, took hold of the skirts of these Jews and said, "We will go with you." So in David's days, whilst he dealt prudently and prospered, so that he became the head of the heathen, a people whom he had not known submitted themselves unto him. The like they did in Solomon's days, as Josephus relateth, as also that the people were then very careful how they received such prosperity-proselytes. So, many strangers followed the captives returning out of Babylon under the conduct of Zerubbabel; and many heathens joined themselves to the Christian congregations under Constantine, the first Christian emperor. The Huns, well-beaten by the Christians, concluded that their God was the true God, and received the gospel. Thus, whether it be in pretence or in truth (as St. Paul hath it) that people come in, God is glorified and his Church amplified, and the saints therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.—*Trapp*.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTER VIII.

Vers. 1, 2. *Advantage of change.* As Goddard was examining with delight some double pinks, which at the time were in full blossom, he was told by the gardener that the same plants had in former years borne only single flowers, but that they had been improved and beautified by repeated transplantations, and that in the same manner a change of soil increases the growth and accelerates the bearing of a young tree. This reminded Goddard that the same happens to men. Many a man who at home would scarcely have borne single flowers, when transplanted by Divine Providence abroad, bears double ones; another, who, if rooted in his native soil, would never have been more than a puny twig, is removed to a foreign clime, and there spreads far and wide his luxuriant boughs, and bears fruit to the delight of all. We may also notice that, as the plant, so the man must have the capacity of bearing fruits and flowers. Esther and Mordecai were fruit-bearing in lowly spheres, and then being placed in high positions they brought forth

more fruit. Through them light and gladness came to all the Jews.

Vers. 1, 2. *Prosperity not suitable for every man.* Great skill is required to the governing of a plentiful and prosperous estate, so as it may be safe and comfortable to the owner, and beneficial to others. Every corporal may know how to order some few files, but to marshal many troops in a regiment in a whole body of an army requires the skill of an experienced general. As for prosperity, every man thinks himself wise and able enough to know how to govern it, and himself in it. A happy estate, we imagine, will easily manage itself, without too much care. Give me but sea-room, saith the confident mariner, and let me alone, whatever tempests arise. Surely the great Doctor of the Gentiles had never made this holy boast of his divine skill, "I know how to abound," if it had been so easy a matter as the world conceives it. Mere ignorance and want of self-experience is guilty of this error.

Mordecai had shown himself possessed of great

skill in the management of small affairs, therefore it was fitting that he should be promoted over the house of Haman, and to the principal position in the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

Signet rings. On the little finger of the right hand is worn a seal-ring, which is generally of silver, with a cornelian, or other stone, upon which is engraved the wearer's name: the name is accompanied by the words, "His servant" (signifying, the servant, or worshipper, of God), and often by other words expressive of the person's trust in God, etc. The seal-ring is used for signing letters and other writings, and its impression is considered more valid than the sign-manual. (Therefore, giving the ring to another person is the utmost sign of confidence.) A little ink is dabbed upon it with one of the fingers, and it is pressed upon the paper; the person who uses it having first touched his tongue with another finger and moistened the place in the paper which is to be stamped. Almost every person who can afford it has a seal-ring, even though he be a servant.—*Biblical Museum.*

Ver. 3. *Honesty in little things.* One of the kings of Persia, who is famous in history for his exact justice, was once out hunting, when, finding himself hungry, he ordered the people to dress a deer that they had just taken. When all was nearly ready, they found that they had forgotten to bring any salt with them, so they sent a lad off to fetch some from a village at a little distance. The king overheard them, and, calling to the boy, said, "And mind you take money to pay for it." The attendants expressed their surprise at his thinking of such trifles, and asked what harm there could be in taking a handful of salt. The king replied, "All the evil that now troubles the earth first began in such trifles, till by degrees it grew to its present height; and if I take the salt, my officers will perhaps seize the cow."

"To put away the mischief of Haman" as it had now reached its climax was difficult. Great evil would have been prevented had Haman in the first instance put away the mischief that was brooding in his heart.

Ver. 5. *Ask and receive.* Sir Walter Raleigh one day asking a favour from Queen Elizabeth, the latter said to him, "Raleigh, when will you leave off begging?" To which he answered, "When your Majesty leaves off giving." Ask great things of God; expect great things from God; let his past goodness make us "instant in prayer." Esther kept on begging till she had secured a position of security for her countrymen. So great was her earnestness that she besought even in tears. Not for herself, but for her country she now prayed to the king. She was an earnest and powerful intercessor. Not so powerful, however, as the great Intercessor; he is a more powerful Pleader, and he approaches a more powerful and more liberal King, even the King of heaven.

Ver. 6. *Patriotism.* A Corsican gentleman, who had been taken prisoner by the Genoese, was thrown into a dark dungeon, where he was chained to the ground. While he was in this

dismal situation, the Genoese sent a message to him, that if he would accept a commission in their service, he might have it. "No," said he; "were I to accept your offer, it would be with a determined purpose to take the first opportunity of returning to the service of my country. But I would not have my countrymen even to suspect that I could be one moment unfaithful." Esther in the same spirit asks, How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

Patriot's duty. When Burnet first began to grow eminent in his profession of the law, he went down to visit his father in Wiltshire. One day, as they were walking in the fields together, the father observed to him that men of his profession were apt to stretch the prerogative of the Crown too far, and injure liberty; but charged him, if he ever came to any eminence in his profession, never to sacrifice the laws and liberty of his country to his own interest or the will of his prince. He repeated this twice, and immediately fell into a fit of apoplexy, of which he died in a few hours; and this advice had so lasting an influence upon the son that he ever after observed and pursued it. Esther preferred the interests of her country before her own aggrandisement.

Spartan patriotism. A Lacedæmonian mother had five sons in a battle that was fought near Sparta, and, seeing a soldier that had left the scene of action, eagerly inquired of him how affairs went on. "All your five sons are slain," said he. "Unhappy wretch!" replied the woman; "I ask thee not of what concerns my children, but of what concerns my country." "As to that, all is well," said the soldier. "Then," said she, "let them mourn that are miserable. My country is prosperous, and I am happy."

Esther wept over the sorrows of her country, and could not rest till she saw her countrymen delivered from impending dangers.

Disinterested loyalty. After the battle of Ivry, Henry IV. of France, being very much in want of money, asked one of his most trusty courtiers where he could procure some. The courtier mentioned a rich merchant's wife, who was a zealous royalist. The monarch in disguise immediately accompanied his courtier on his visit to the lady, Madame le Clerc, who received them with great hospitality, and congratulated them on the success of the king's arms. "Alas, madam," replied the courtier, "to what purpose are all our victories? We are in the greatest distress imaginable. His Majesty has no money to pay his troops; they threaten to revolt and join the League. Mayenne will triumph at last." "Is it possible?" exclaimed Madame le Clerc; "but I hope that will not afflict our sovereign, and that he will find new resources in the loyalty of his subjects." She then quitted the room, but soon returned with several bags of gold, which she presented, saying, "This is all I can do at present. Go and relieve the king from his anxiety. I wish him all the success and happiness he deserves. Tell him to be confident that he reigns in the hearts of his subjects, and that my life and fortune are, and ever will be, at his disposal." The king could no longer

conceal his incognito. "Generous woman," he cried, "my friend has no occasion to go far to tell his Majesty the excellence of your heart; here he stands before you, and is a witness to it. Be assured that the favour will be indelibly engraven on the heart of your prince." From that time success attended the king, and when he was master of the capital, and safely seated on the throne, he sent for Madame le Clerc, and, presenting her to a full and brilliant court, said, "You see this lady, who is a true friend of mine. To her I owe all the successes of my last campaigns. It was she who lent me money to carry on the war when the troops threatened to abandon me."

Mordecai and Esther were loyal both to King Ashasuerus and to the race of the Jews. Haman's fall was a blessing both to the king and to the nation. The extermination of the Jews would have been a great disaster.

Ver. 10. *Sealing letters.* The authenticity of a merchant's letters, as of his bills, depends entirely upon the seal. It is not usual to sign either; and they are not often written in the hand of the person who sends them; so that it is the seal which is of importance. Engraven upon it is the name and title, if he has one, of the person it belongs to, and the date when it was cut. The occupation of seal-cutter is one of much trust and some danger: he keeps a register of every seal he makes, and if one is stolen or lost by the party to whom he sold it, his life would answer for the crime of making another exactly the same. The person to whom it belongs, if in business, is obliged to take the two most respectable witnesses of the occurrence, and to write to his correspondents, declaring all accounts and business with his former seal null from the day upon which it was lost.—*Biblical Museum.*

Cheerful and beautiful for Christ. While your religion is impressive by its consistency, let it be attractive by its amiableness. Therefore, think upon and pursue whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. In excuse for the disagreeable tempers and the repulsive manners of some Christians, it is said that grace may be grafted on a crab-stock. Be it so. But instead of excusing the improprieties, the metaphor condemns. When a tree is grafted, it is always expected to bear fruit according to the scion, and not according to the stock: and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Nothing commends godliness more than cheerfulness. All men desire happiness; and if, while every other candidate for the prize fails, you succeed, your success may determine others to follow your envied course. Hence it is not very desirable that religion should be so often expressed by the word "seriousness." Among many people, as soon as ever a man has become religious, it is said he is becoming "serious." But does not religion also make him humble, and benevolent, and hopeful, and blessed? Why, then, should we select so exclusively for the designation of its

influence an attribute or an effect which is common with many others, but yet the least inviting, and most liable to an injurious construction? I never use it; and if I were obliged to use any other term than religion itself, I would rather say the man was becoming happy.—*Wm. Jay.*

The Jews here had joy and honour. The Christian should always be in this condition.

Ver. 17. *House of joy.*

I see a forest, dark, dim, deep, and dread,
Whose solemn shades no human foot or eye
Can penetrate; but now, oh, see! a veil
Falls from my strengthened eyes; and now
Even in its deepest centre I behold
A spot more beautiful than human heart
Can comprehend; it is the home of joy;
And there the blessed spirit broods for ever,
Making her dwelling-place a heaven; there
The skies are pure as crystal, and the eye
Looks through their clear expanse direct to God.
No sun is there; the air itself is light
And life; a rainbow spans it like a crown
Of tearless glory, and the forest trees
Sweep round it in a belt of living green.
Colour, that wayward sprite of changeable mien,
Is here subdued to an intensity
Of burning lustre. Sound has but one voice,
And that is joyous song; sight but one object,
And that is happiness; mine eyes are strained
To catch the lineaments of the bright queen
Whose dwelling-place I see; but 'tis in vain;
Nowhere distinct, yet felt in all, she glides,
A shape of light and colour, through the air,
Making its pure transparency to thrill
With the soft music of her viewless step.

Reddal.

A feast and a good day. These Jews had a feast and a good day, for they were delivered from the fear of their enemies. But surely we may go further, and picture them rejoicing because the righteous are vindicated, and the holy ones are now delivered from the hand of the oppressor. The nation may well rejoice when the righteous are exalted. God often gives to his people on earth a feast and a good day. Every Sabbath should be such a day. Every good day on earth should be a type of the unending feast and uninterrupted good day of heaven. And how transcendent the glory of that world where there shall be no more sin or imperfection, where we all unite in the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" "The glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." The idolatrous temple of Diana was so bright and splendid that the door-keeper always cried to them that entered it, "Take heed to your eyes." But what faculties of vision must we have to behold the glory of the temple above! If it is said that the righteous themselves shall shine forth as the sun, what will be the splendour of the Eternal Throne! What a delightful change from this world of darkness and imperfection to that where all shall be light and glory!

Ver. 8. *Snow and the king's edict.* Here, a second time in the history of Artaxerxes, we

have a proof of the felt inconvenience of that law, which despotism itself could not set aside. Gladly would the king be a party to the practical defeating of the object of it; but in its literal acceptance it must stand.

It is said that something like the principle of the unchangeableness of the purposes of the kings of Persia has been preserved in that country even till recent times. And a circumstance may be here alluded to in illustration of this, which although somewhat strange and almost ludicrous, yet does bear some resemblance to the difficulty in which Artaxerxes felt himself placed between the unalterable law, and the willingness which he displayed at the same time to get quit of the obligation to observe it literally. A Persian king, who reigned not very many years ago (Aga Mahmed Khan), having set out upon a military

expedition, and encamped in a place convenient for his purpose, gave forth his edict that the encampment should not be removed until the snow had disappeared from the neighbouring mountains. The season was severe. The snow clung to the mountains longer than usual, and in the mean time the army became straitened for supplies. Here was an unexpected difficulty. The king's appointment must stand, but the result was likely to be ruinous. To avert the difficulty, then, a vast multitude of labourers were despatched to clear away as far as they could the snow that was visible from the camp; and with their aid, and the help of a few days of sunshine, the snow disappeared, and then immediately the army was put in motion.—*Davidson.*

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.] The Jews destroy their enemies, and at Mordecai's request establish the festival of Purim. 1. **In the twelfth month, on the thirteenth day of the same, the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities, &c.]** Several parenthetical clauses succeed this definition of time, so that the statement of what then took place does not follow till ver. 2.—*Keil.* These clauses state the meaning of the day just named, and give a general notice of the conflict between the Jews and their enemies. The word translated "when" may be here taken as the accusative of time, in which, or where, the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put into execution, *i. e.* in which the king's word and law should be carried out. The day was changed from a day of misfortune to a day of prosperity for the Jews. "On the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have the mastery over them, and it was changed (*i. e.* the contrary occurred), that the Jews had the mastery over them that hated them." 2. **For the fear of them fell upon all the people]** A general terror spread from a feeling that the Jews were the special favourites of the most high God; and while this feeling disheartened and unnerved their enemies, it gave inspiration and power to the Jews. We may naturally suppose that Jewish antipathy and anger would, at least in some cases, lead them to assault their foes, and that the Jews would not remain wholly on the defensive. 3.] All the princes, the satraps, and governors, and also other persons of rank whom it is unnecessary here to name (comp. chap. iii. 9), assisted the Jews. Rawlinson says this is very important. It has been stated that, according to the narrative of Esther, the Jews were allowed to kill 75,000 Persians, and this (supposed) feature of the narrative has been pronounced incredible. The present verse shows that the real Persians, who formed the standing army which kept the empire in subjection, and were at the disposal of the various governors of the provinces, took the Jews' side. Their enemies were almost entirely to be found among the idolatrous people of the subject nations, for whose lives neither the Persians generally nor their monarchs cared greatly. 4. **For Mordecai was great in the king's house** (was much esteemed by the king), **and his fame went through all the provinces: for this man Mordecai became continually greater.]** 6. **In Shushan the palace the Jews slew . . . five hundred]** Shushan the palace is here evidently to be taken in the sense of the place or city of the palace, equivalent to *in* or *at Shushan*, as in ver. 15. It is not to be supposed that the work of slaughter was carried on within the palace itself.—*Whedon's Com.* 7—9.] These names of Haman's ten sons are written in Hebrew MSS. in perpendicular columns, and it is said that the reader in the synagogue is required to pronounce them all at one breath. The Targum says they were all suspended, one above another, upon one cross, fifty cubits high, which Mordecai had prepared for the purpose. Most of these names are of Persian origin, a fact which has great weight in showing the genuineness of the Book of Esther.—*Whedon's Com.* Jewish rabbis have found these names indicative of a representative impotence, and have taken the individual traits to mean something prophetic. 10. **On the spoil laid they not their hand]** To show that they only sought the safety of their own lives, and had no desire to enrich themselves by the goods of their fallen foes. 12.] If the Jews had killed five hundred men in Susa, how many may they not have slain in other parts of the kingdom? The king recognizes the fact that, if the Jews had to do with so many opponents, they could hardly have mastered them,

and even now great danger threatened them on the part of those remaining, if they could not hunt down such in their hiding-places, and destroy them utterly. 13. **To do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree]** This request of Esther has been pronounced the offspring of a blood-thirsty vengeance, and desire to have another day for the butchery of enemies. But what was "this day's decree" which the queen desired to be continued another day? Merely "to stand for their life" against all that would assault them. Hence we infer that the queen believed, or had reason to suspect, that the enemies of the Jews in Shushan would renew the attack upon the following day. So fearfully enraged were these enemies that they were likely to retaliate for their losses by an unauthorized continuance of the fight, and it was to secure her people against such an event Esther wisely made this request. This extension of the decree was to have effect only *in Shushan*, not in the provinces.—*Whedon's Com.* **Let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows]** *i. e.* cruelty the dead bodies in order to increase the disgrace of their execution, but more in order to augment the fear of the Jews. This was the Hebrew and Persian custom.—*Lange.* 16. **And had rest from their enemies]** The position of these words in the middle of the verse is noticeably strange. There may be here some disarrangement of the text, or it may be, as Keil suggests, "that the narrator desired at once to point out how the matter ended." Such apparent disorder of the text is not always to be regarded as evidence of corruption by transcribers. The Hebrew writers are not always the best models of accuracy and perfection of literary style. **Seventy and five thousand]** "The slaughter of these seventy-five thousand shows," says Wordsworth, "that a very large number of their heathen enemies, who had been exasperated against the Jews, had prepared themselves for an attack upon them; and that, presuming upon their own numbers and forces as compared with the Jews, they assaulted them in order to destroy and despoil them, and to enrich themselves with their property; and that the Jews made a vigorous resistance, and by the help of God, routed their assailants with a great discomfiture. The slaughter was not the consequence of a vindictive spirit in the Jews, but of the bitter animosity of their enemies; and it proves that the Jews would have been extinguished (as Haman's decree intended that they should be) if God had not interfered to rescue them from destruction." 17—19. **Therefore . . . the fourteenth day]** Because the Jews outside of Shushan did all their fighting on the thirteenth, and rested on the fourteenth, as stated in ver. 17. **Therefore]** they made the latter day their day of feasting and joy; but the Jews in Shushan, having fought both on the thirteenth and fourteenth, made the fifteenth their feast day (ver. 18). **Jews of the villages]** Rather of the country places, that is, as distinguished from those that dwell in cities and the country (not *uncalled towns*, as our version has it, for some of these country towns may have had walls). The writer of this was evidently a citizen of Shushan, and seems to have regarded the whole Persian empire outside of this capital city as country.—*Whedon's Com.* **And of sending portions one to another]** According to ver. 22, one made presents in these feasts, similar to the sacrificial feasts, to those less wealthy, but also to others to whom one desired to signify a joyous mind.—*Lange.* 20—32.] The feast of Purim instituted by letters from Mordecai and Esther. 20. **Mordecai wrote these things]** Namely, the things or occurrences that transpired throughout the Persian empire on the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth of Adar. He wrote a report of the matter as of something worthy to be chronicled for everlasting remembrance, and with this record he also sent letters unto all the Jews throughout the empire of Alasuerus, proposing to them what is stated in the next two verses. Mordecai's official position in the Persian court enabled him to establish this festival as no other Jew could have done. He could issue orders with royal authority, and use the posts and agents of the empire to facilitate his plans. The statement here made, that Mordecai chronicled these events and wrote letters to all the Jews, will not warrant the conclusion that he was the author of this Book of Esther, but is sufficient to show that such a conclusion is not therefore improbable.—*Whedon's Com.* 21.] To establish a matter, to authorize it. 23. **The Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written to them]** They had begun, as ver. 22 tells us, by keeping both days, and Mordecai wrote to them that they should make this an annual custom. This they agreed to do, in consequence of Mordecai's letters. The reason for their so doing is given in vers. 24 and 25, and the name of this festival is explained in ver. 26, by a brief recapitulation of the events which gave rise to it.—*Keil.* 25. **When Esther came before the king]** As the word Esther is not in the Hebrew text, and is not mentioned in the context, it is better to translate "when it came before the king," that is, when Haman's wicked device came before the king.—*Whedon's Com.* 26.] They evidently chose the name Purim in ironical reference to the fact that Haman's lucky day (designated by lot) was so fortunate for his enemies, and so unlucky for himself. 27.] The Jews established and took upon themselves, their descendants, and all who should join themselves unto them (proselytes), so that it should not fail (*i. e.* invariably), to keep (to celebrate) these two days according to the writing concerning them and the time appointed thereby year by year.—*Keil.* 28. **And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and these days of Purim are not to pass away among the Jews, nor their remembrance to cease among their seed]** The continued observance of Purim to this day is a monumental proof of the truth of this history. 29—32.] A second letter from queen Esther and Mordecai to appoint fasting and lamentation on the days of Purim. 29.] And Esther the queen and Mordecai the Jew wrote with all strength, that is, very forcibly, to appoint this second letter concerning Purim, *i. e.* to give to the contents of this second letter the force of laws.—*Keil.* 31. **The matters of the fastings and their cry]** Here it incidentally comes out that fasting and lamentation were also to be

connected with the observance of Purim. The modern Jews observe the thirteenth of Adar, the anniversary of the day of slaughter, as a day of fasting, and call it *the fast of Esther*. This day of fasting and supplication is preliminary to the two days' feast that follows. It is not improbable that Esther herself may have proposed this fast, as a memorial of the grief that preceded their joy, and that the people approved and sanctioned it, and called it Esther's fast. **32. The decree of Esther**] This is to be understood as the same with the letter of authority respecting Purim which is mentioned in ver. 29, and was issued by both Esther and Mordecai. **It was written in the book**] The decree of Esther was recorded, and doubtless with it, also, an account of the institution of the feast of Purim. *The book* referred to here is somewhat uncertain. Some have thought the Book of Esther is intended; but the author of that book would hardly have designated his own work in this way. Bertheau and Keil think it was a book or treatise on the feast of Purim, which our author used in preparing his work, but which has not come down to us. This, however, is purely conjectural. It seems most natural, since we have in several other passages of this history a mention of the book of the chronicles of Media and Persia (chap. ii. 23; vi. 1; x. 2), to understand *the book* of this verse as that same book of State annals. The documents issued by Esther and Mordecai, establishing the feast of Purim, and perhaps, also, describing its origin and mode of observance, may well have been registered among the national chronicles. The following account of the manner in which the feast of Purim is observed by the Jews of the present day is substantially from Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible':—The observance commences with *the fast of Esther* (see note above on ver. 31) on the thirteenth of Adar. If the thirteenth falls upon a sabbath, the fast is placed upon the Thursday preceding. As soon as the evening preceding the fourteenth of the month arrives, candles are lighted in token of rejoicing, and the people assemble at the synagogue. The Book of Esther, written on a roll called *the Megillah*, is produced, and, after a short prayer, the reader proceeds to read it in a histrionic manner, aiming to suit his tones and gestures to the sense. When he pronounces the name of Haman the congregation exclaim, "May his name be blotted out," or, "Let the name of the ungodly perish," and at the same time the children present make a great noise with their hands, or with pieces of wood and stone. The names of Haman's ten sons are read with one breath, to signify that they were all hung at once. (Comp. note on chap. ix. 7—9.) When the roll is read through the whole congregation exclaim, "Cursed be Haman; blessed be Mordecai; cursed be Zeresh, the wife of Haman; blessed be Esther; cursed be all idolaters; blessed be all Israelites, and blessed be Harbonah, who hanged Haman." When this evening service is over all go home and partake of a simple repast. On the morning of the fourteenth all resort to the synagogue again; prayer is offered, and the passage of the law (Exod. xvii. 8—16) relating the destruction of the Amalekites is read, for the Jews regard Haman as a descendant of Agag the Amalekite. (See note on chap. iii. 1.) The roll of Esther is again read, as on the preceding evening. When the synagogue service is ended, all give themselves over to feasting and joy. Presents are sent to and from friends and relations, and liberal gifts are bestowed upon the poor. Games, dramatical entertainments, dancing, and music are resorted to, and every effort is made to promote general merriment and joy. Such festivities and joy are continued through the fifteenth also, but any Jews who desire may carry on their usual business during the days of this festival. Josephus attests the observance of Purim in his day: "Even now all the Jews in the world celebrate these days with feasting (*ἐορτάζουσιν*), sending portions to one another. . . . They celebrate the fore-mentioned days, calling them *Thouraim* (*Θουραϊσμός*)."—*Ant.* xi. 13. A number of Jewish proverbs also attest the high esteem in which this feast was held: "The temple may fail, but Purim never." "The Prophets may fail, but not the Megillah." It was even said that no books would survive in the Messiah's kingdom but the Law and the Megillah.—*Whedon's Com.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 1.

HOPE AND FOREBODING.

WE often hear that it is darkest just before the dawn, darkest in the natural world, darkest in the moral world, darkest in the world of God's providential arrangements. Often has this been illustrated and proved in the history, both of individuals and of nations. The laws of nature are typical of the laws of God's kingdom; essentially they are the same, as coming from the same ruler. In the natural world the deeper darkness is the herald of coming day; so it often has been in all histories, whether individual or national. The darkness was now deepening about the Jews; the month Adar was now close at hand. The fatal day drew near when the king's commandment and his decree were to be put into execution; but the fatal day was turned into the festal day. The light afar off was sending forth its beautiful and cheering rays; but the Jews had not the power to catch the oncoming gladness, for their eyes were too dull to see: so it may be

with us. Let us trust in God through the storm, and through the darkness. Let us pray—Open our eyes that we may see when all around appears dark and dismal. On the other hand, it must be remembered that there is a real darkness thickening around the sinner, while he fondly dreams of glorious light. It was so with these “enemies of the Jews.” They vainly thought that the thirteenth day of the month Adar was to be the day of their victory. On that day the sun was to shine upon their pathway of triumph. Alas! on that day the sun was but to shine as a funeral taper on their gloomy pathway to the everlasting darkness. Let evil-doers beware; let them seek to be wise in time; let them strive to have understanding of the times; let them not dream of coming light, when all the signs indicate that the darkness is only growing more intense.

I. Hope blighted. “In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them.” From a human point of view it was natural that these enemies of the Jews should entertain such a hope. The human reasonableness of this hope may be shown—(a) *From their own numbers.* The population was undoubtedly large as seen from the immense numbers slain by the Jews. It was natural then, as it is natural now, to rely upon numbers. We expect success on the side of that army that can bring the largest forces into the field, other things being equal. (b) *From the insignificance of the Jews.* A few people scattered up and down that vast country in a state of captivity, could have no chance against their numerous and powerful enemies. These Persians calculated as we calculate to-day, and they found, as we moderns too often find to our cost, that they reckoned without their host. There is a true, broad sense in which the battle is the Lord’s, and He can save by few as well as by many. (c) *From the known unchangeableness of Persian law.* There did not seem the slightest chance for the Jews. The hope of these enemies of the Jews rested on as good ground as any hope could do. But after all it was blighted, for the hope was changed. In a short time there was a marvellous vicissitude. Their sun of expectation suddenly shot into darkness just as they were fancying that it was nearing the meridian of splendour. Thus, the hope of the unjust must perish sooner or later. There can be no escape. The goodly houses built upon the sand of human reasoning must be swept away, even though the sand may appear to possess the solidity of the rock.

II. Foreboding removed. The same human reasoning which led these enemies of the Jews to entertain hope would induce the Jews to give way to dark and injurious forebodings. If the faithful and valorous Esther had her great fears, how much more is it to be supposed that the rest of the Jews would look forward to the month Adar in a spirit of agonizing dread. How often we look forward to a month Adar, and see it shrouded with ominous darkness. There is such a month in the lives of most. Yea, there are gloomy temperaments to whom every year has its month Adar, rising gloomily, and yet grand in its gloom, like some lofty mountain. But the month Adar may, after all, be the month of rejoicing. As the traveller rejoices when he reaches the mountain top, and feasts upon the grand panorama of nature, so these Jews might rejoice when they reached the thirteenth day of the month Adar. The very day we feared has been the day of Divine deliverance and of Divine blessing. It is a day of rejoicing, but it is a day of humiliation. God’s grant of success may be God’s reproof of our unbelief and our forebodings. However darkly the month Adar may loom in the distance, let us move on towards it, encouraging ourselves in the Lord our God. Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed. Hope on, hope always. Above all things, do not indulge in forebodings. It is injurious to thy own nature. It saps thy vital energies. It undermines thy physical strength and thy mental power. It can mend nothing, and is the result, in part, of a want of faith in God. It is sinful if there be no effort to overcome.

III. True hope rewarded. “It was turned to the contrary that the Jews had rule over them that hated them.” Those amongst the Jews who looked above the

vain state of men and things to the great supreme, and entertained hope in spite of all that seemed to make against hope, had their glorious reward in due season. The Jews had the mastery over their enemies. God's people must finally triumph over their real foes. Real foes, for there are foes in seeming which are true friends. But no real foes, that is, foes that militate against highest interests, will be allowed to reign in perpetual triumph. Every enemy must be destroyed; even the last enemy, death, must be put under the feet. The hope of the righteous cannot perish. What happened unto the Jews, happened to them for ensamples to the people of God in all ages. Our moral experiences will find their counterpart in what we may call the material experiences of the Jewish people. They triumphed in a more material point of view. Their successes were even in the present state. God's people now must look to triumph in a moral point of view. Their true success must be in the mighty future of God's eternity. The hope that is built upon God's word cannot fail. The hope that springs from faith in Jesus Christ must bloom into the flowers of paradise that never fade, and ripen into the fruits of the celestial Eden that never decay. Have faith in God, and in Jesus Christ his only Son.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 1.

He himself says once, with more justice than originality: Man is, properly speaking, based upon hope; he has no other possession than hope; this world of his is emphatically the place of hope. What then was our professor's possession? We see him, for the present, quite shut out from hope; not looking into the golden orient, but vaguely all round into a dim copper firmament, pregnant with earthquake and tornado.—*Sartor Resartus*.

In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped, &c. But their hope ran aslope, as they say; their lucky day deceived them. Wicked men's hope, when they most need it, will be as the giving up of the ghost, and that is but cold comfort; and as the spider's web, who gets to the top of the window as high as she can, and then when she falls she falls to the bottom, for nothing stays her. From such high hopes fell our English Papists; first, when Queen Mary died. You hope and hope (said Dale the promoter to Julian Irving, whom he had apprehended), but your hope should end in a rope; for though the queen fail, she that you hope for should never come to it; for there is my Lord Cardinal's grace and many more between her and it. Secondly, at Queen Elizabeth's death, that long-looked for day, as they called it, triumphing before the victory, and selling the hide before they

had taken the beast. This they had done before in 1588, when in assurance of victory they had styled their forces the Invincible Armada; and also afterwards at the powder-plot, when they had presumptuously disposed of the chief offices, holds, and revenues of the land; like as before the Pharsalian field was fought, the Pompeians were in such miserable security, that some of them contended for the priesthood, which was Caesar's office; others disposed of the consulships and offices in Rome. So at the battle of Agincourt in France, where our Henry V. won the day, the French were so confident of a victory that they sent to king Henry to know what ransom he would give. A presumptuous confidence goes commonly bleeding home, when an humble fear returns in triumph.—*Trapp*.

Though it was turned to the contrary.—By a sweet and gracious providence of God, whose glory it is to help at a pinch, to alter the scene all on a sudden, to begin where we have given over, and to cause a strange turn of things, according to that of the Psalmist; God should send from heaven and save me (when it might seem to some that salvation itself could not save me), he should send forth his mercy and his truth, and then what should hinder the Church's happiness?—*Trapp*.

The day in which the enemies of the

Jews expected to see the realization of their hopes, became instead for the Jews a day of victory, and for their enemies a day of reverse and defeat. This, under existing circumstances, seemed to be a change which could only be brought about, as it were, by a miracle. It was, indeed, one of those providences by means of which it has pleased God to reveal himself from time to time in an especially remarkable manner. At all events, the prophets had foretold such occurrences as a matter surely to be expected. When the captivity of Israel should have reached its culmination, when the people of God are on the point of expiring under the rod of their drivers, then, instead of really perishing, they should become captors of their captors and taskmasters of their drivers. What is here shown in a small prelude, according to such prophecy, should attain a much larger circumference and a much greater glory. Our book itself, according to its deeper significance, points in in a manner typical or prophetic to this great and glorious final history. As a matter of fact, this change of affairs was itself deeply grounded in the nature and circumstances of things. So certain as the God of Israel was the only true God, whose kingdom should not be destroyed, but through all apparent reverses should continually rise to new and greater victories, so likewise to his people,—so long as it is the sole bearer of his sway, the grave, which threatens to swallow it up, should ever be a place of revivification and resurrection. And to-day also his empire must continue; and that which thought to overcome its power must itself be overcome, and either be absorbed or consigned to destruction. All the days of persecution of God's kingdom are days indeed in which its enemies hope to overcome it, but it always turns out that such enemies are themselves conquered at last.—*Lange.*

We have above such an example in Haman, who was himself hung on the cross which he had prepared for Mordecai; so the Egyptians were themselves overwhelmed in the sea to which they had driven the Israelites in order to

overwhelm them. So also Saul, who had driven David over to the Philistines, that they might destroy him, was himself destroyed by the Philistines.—*Brenz.*

We learn from this passage the comfortable truth, that God's people obtain the victory over their enemies. Whatever hardships and troubles God's people have to endure in the world, and however dark and lowering the cloud may be which sometimes hangs over them, yet, "at evening time it will be light to them," and death's temporary triumph over them will only lead to their eternal triumph over it and all their foes. Be not discouraged, ye that fear and serve the Lord. Greater is he that is for you than all that can be against you. Fight the good fight of faith, the crown of life is sure to all who are in Christ.—*Davidson.*

Foresight and foreboding are two very different things. It is not that the one is the exaggeration of the other, but the one is opposed to the other. The more a man looks forward in the exercise of foresight, the less he does so in the exercise of foreboding; and the more he is tortured by anxious thoughts about a possible future, the less clear vision has he of a likely future, and the less power to influence it.

What does your anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow of its sorrows, but it empties to-day of its strength; it does not make you escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes; it does not bless to-morrow, and it robs to-day. For every day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. Do not add to-morrow's to to-day's. Do not drag the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. As thy day, thy strength shall be. In strict proportion to the existing exigencies will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense to-day's sorrows by experience, and to-morrow's sorrows by anticipation, into the narrow round of the one four-and

twenty hours, there is no promise that as that day thy strength shall be.

God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of his making; but he does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making, which the anticipation of sorrow most assuredly is.

Our hope should make us buoyant, and should keep us firm. It is an anchor of the soul. All men live by hope, even when it is fixed upon the changing and uncertain things of this world. But the hopes of men, who have not their hearts fixed upon God, try to grapple themselves on the cloud-rack that rolls along the flanks of the

mountains, and *our* hopes pierce within that veil and lay hold of the Rock of Ages that towers above the flying vapours. Let us then be strong, for our future is not a dim peradventure, or a vague dream, nor a fancy of our own, nor a wish turning itself into a vision; but it is made and certified by him who is God of all past and of all the present. It is built upon his word, and the brightest hope of all its brightness is the enjoyment of more of his presence and the possession of more of his likeness. That hope is certain. Therefore let us live in it. "Reach forth unto the things that are before."—*Maclaren*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 2, 3.

SELF-HELP BRINGS HELP.

I. Divine help. In this narrative we see all along that the Jews were helped by God. We find clear traces of a superior power delivering this people from the power of their enemies. Mere human reasons cannot account for the fact that these Jews—captive and dispersed—so marvellously triumphed over the many and skilful foes arrayed against them. We are now brought to the point where the Divine power is most manifestly revealed. All need Divine help, and all must have it more or less in the journey of life if it is to be successful in the highest point of view.

II. Divine help fosters and succeeds self-help. Some speak loudly in the praise of self-help. It must not be undervalued. But to speak to bruised and maimed humanity of self-help apart from any other help is a solemn mockery, is a withering irony. Should we tell the drowning man to try self-help, and not throw out to him the rope of help? Should we tell the bankrupt and ruined man to try self-help, and give him no capital? Should we advise the poor outcast to try self-help, and yet leave him without a character? Our ruined selves must be repaired from above before we can effectually help ourselves. Divine help must first work, and then there can be successful self-help. Jesus did not say to the man with the withered arm, Trust to self-help. Power was conveyed in the word, Stretch forth thy hand; and then the man was able to help himself. This, too, be observed—put forth all thy power, and God will not fail. Help thyself first by heartily seeking help from heaven, and then by doing thy very utmost. These Jews helped themselves by (a) *co-operation*. "The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus." In these days of vast co-operative societies—of the teachings of political economy—it may not be needful to urge the advantages of co-operation. However, the Church still needs to learn the important lesson that its members should be gathered together, not as so many mere material bodies, but as being animated by one spirit. The members of the spiritual Israel must be gathered together so as to make one compact body. The day has not yet come when Christians are of one mind. Many men, many minds; many Christians, many minds. Members of the same branch of the Christian community do not co-operate. Let us gather ourselves together around the Cross of Jesus Christ, and taste the outflowing and uniting power of the Saviour's love. (b) By *active agency*. "To lay hand on such as sought their hurt." Never

mind the difficult questions suggested by the course of proceedings described in this chapter; be practical. Learn the lesson that they co-operated for work. They did not co-operate merely by assembling together at public meetings in order to be told, in eloquent language, how the thing was to be done, and then dispersing without any well-timed effort to do the thing. There was no Exeter Hall in Shushan; there was no need of priestly eloquence. Patriotism stirred their hearts; a common danger impelled to united efforts at defence. Patriotism should stir the hearts of Englishmen to-day. The common danger that threatens our holy religion should impel all lovers of Jesus to united and mighty efforts. Let us lay the hand of love on such as seek the hurt of all that is true, and noble, and virtuous. There is a call, loud and long, to-day to every one, whether clergy or laity, to active agency in order to repress evil, and to promote the best interests—that is, the Christian interests—of our humanity. (c) *By a name of power.* The fear of the Jews fell upon all the people, from the lowest to the highest, for the leaders of the people felt this fear. Is there not a true sense in which the fear of the Christian should fall upon the wicked? Does not the sinner quake in the presence of the pure and the holy? However, the Christian's name should be one of power, not only to inspire fear, but to attract. (d) *By aggressive measures.* "No man could withstand them." There was a time when it seemed to come near the truth to say that no man could withstand the influence of Christianity. It went forth an all-subduing force; it went forth conquering and to conquer. Wonderful the successes and the triumphs of the primitive Church! But alas! what shall we say of these times? Shall we take up our lament and say, How is the mighty fallen? Shall we not be accused of pessimism if we declare that Christianity is now being conquered by the world, instead of the world being conquered by Christianity? The world says that Christianity is effete. Does Christianity, by its modern successes, disprove the accusations of the children of this world? Certainly much, very much more requires to be done. Oh, arm of the Lord, awake!

III. Self-help secures the help of others. That is, the self-help that is successful secures the help of others, for in this sense it often is that nothing succeeds like success. At all events, all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king helped the Jews—to what extent is not stated. They probably facilitated the Jews in their preparations to defend themselves. These governors saw that the Jews were on the high road to victory, and therefore they went in for the winning side. They were most likely politic men, and the fear of losing their places would induce them to help the Jews. How many helpers in this world are ready to help those who do not require help? Alas! how few are found to give help to the really helpless and forlorn. The poor and thirsty still seek the water of help and of deliverance, but find none; while the rich and prosperous have much abundance poured into the lap. This world's helpers go to the rich and the great; Christ, the great helper of humanity, went to the publicans and harlots. He gave help to the helpless, strength to the weak, water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, healing to the poor sick, and life to the dead.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 2, 3.

The Jews were the conquerors. "The day in which their enemies hoped to have power over them was turned to the contrary, so that the Jews had rule over those that hated them." This was the doing of the Lord, and ought to be wondrous in our eyes. But though the victory was of God, means were em-

ployed in winning it; and the first was, the valour and good conduct of the Jews themselves. They "stood for their lives," and "remembering the Lord, who is great and terrible," "fought for their brethren, their sons and their daughters, their wives and their houses." And their prudence equalled their cour-

age. Had each endeavoured to protect himself and his family, they would have become an easy prey to their foes; but they "gathered themselves together in their cities in all the provinces," and in this way encouraged one another, and presented a formidable front to their adversaries. Secondly, their enemies were struck with terror. Disappointed of the hopes which they had cherished, perceiving the boldness and wise conduct of the Jews, and convinced in their own breasts that they were embarked in an unjust and criminal design, they lost courage and yielded up the day. Thirdly, the rulers in the different provinces encouraged the Jews by their countenance, being induced to this by the awe in which they stood of Mordecai, who not only retained his high place, but rose daily in the royal favour, and in his reputation as an able and virtuous statesman.—*M'Crie.*

The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. "Thou shalt not kill." This commandment, in some cases, binds us to kill. It requires us to use all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life; and in preserving our own lives, we may be reduced to the unpleasant necessity of taking away the lives of other men. The Jews were compelled on the thirteenth day of the month Adar to take arms into their hands to destroy all that might rise up against them; and they acted wisely in uniting themselves in large bodies to resist the power of their enemies. Had they stood single in arms, they might all have been destroyed with ease. But their combination in the various cities of the king's dominions made them terrible and irresistible. Let us learn from their example to stand fast in one spirit, and with one mind, to strive against the enemies of our souls, who endeavour to rob us of our faith, more precious than our lives. The Church is terrible, like an army with banners, when her rulers and members are closely united, under

the captain of salvation, to oppose her enemies.

No man could now withstand the Jews, for the fear of them fell upon all people. They had the king, the queen, the prime minister, upon their side, and, what was still more, they had the providence of God upon their side. "He caused judgment to be heard from heaven," as audibly as if an angel had proclaimed his favour to the Jews, and his indignation against their enemies. The wonderful works of Providence have oft struck terror into the hardiest enemies of Zion.

And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. There were two decrees in equal force which might have given them a fair pretence for taking the part of the Jews, or of their enemies, as they pleased; but it was plain that the king's favour was towards the Jews, and that if they expected any favour from him, it was necessary to secure the good will of Mordecai. They chose that side in the contest which their own interest prescribed. What a pity is it that all princes do not favour the cause of religion! If they did, iniquity would be compelled to stop her mouth, and those men who do not value religion would treat it at least with respect.—*Laurens.*

They acted in unison. "They gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives." Union is power: concentration of strength is mighty for good and for evil. How awful the extent of the mischief perpetrated by the evil spirits, because they act in concert—unitedly: whereas disunion would cause even *their* kingdom to fall. By virtue of this perfect combination they succeed in deceiving the nations, and leading myriads captive at their will. Satan thus maintains such a sway over mankind as to entitle him to the name of "God of this world." "If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then can his kingdom stand?" Union and co-operation are likewise powerful for the production of good. Hence copies of the Divine writings are

flying to all parts of the world; and missionaries to unfold their precious contents to those who are perishing for lack of knowledge. What would individual efforts do in cases like these? Hence arise hospitals for the bodies of men, and places of instruction for their souls. Amid the favourable signs of our day, this is among the most cheering—the frequent formation of associations for the amelioration of the state of man. May new plans of usefulness be still devised, and may the blessed Spirit of God stir up the people to support them, so that at home and abroad truth and holiness may flourish and abound.

They laid hands on all such as sought their hurt, and no man could withstand them. They were acting legally; for the royal law permitted them to defend themselves: and when we act legally, we may act boldly and courageously.

Trust in God, in his power and faithfulness, is the only source of true magnanimity. It is this alone that makes man undaunted on *rational* grounds. St. Paul tells us of the ancient believers, that “out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” And this, he tells us, was the effect of relying on God.

God filled the Persians with fear and trembling, so that, when the battle took place, they were so intimidated, that they made but the feeblest resistance, and fell an easy prey into the hands of their enemies. “No man could withstand them” (the Jews), “for the fear of them fell upon all people.” This was one way by which the Lord promised of old victory to the Israelites over their enemies. If they would regard his laws, he engaged to deprive their adversaries of their courage and fortitude. “I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.”

Brethren, none can injure whom God is resolved to protect. He has all hearts in his hand. Though earth and hell combine against his people, they shall

not prosper. He is a munition of rocks—a strong tower, into which the righteous flee, and are in safety. What was David compared with Goliath? Yet, inasmuch as he went forth in the name of the God of the armies of Israel, the vaunting Philistine soon fell before him. God is a man of war, and makes his people more than conquerors over the opponents of their salvation. “None shall pluck them out of my Father’s hands.” Trust in him, ye infirm and feeble, and ye shall tread down your enemies—one of you shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. Brethren, we have more formidable enemies than these Jews had,—more crafty and more inveterate,—even the principalities and powers of hell; and the consequences of being vanquished are infinitely more woeful. None can defeat and destroy these enemies but he who defeated the counsel and prevented the evil designs of wicked Haman. Apply to this great Being—this Omnipotent Being—in the all-prevailing name of Christ, and you shall triumph over every foe: you shall have a day of feasting and gladness—a good day—a day of pure and holy and everlasting joy. Trust in him, and heaven shall be your dwelling-place for ever. “The Lord will give strength to his people: the Lord will bless his people with peace.” —*Hughes.*

And no man could withstand them. A good cause, a good conscience, and a good courage; what cannot these three do when they meet? How should any stand before those who are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might? Pilate’s wife could warn him of meddling with such; and Haman’s wife could tell him that a Jew might fall before a Persian and get up again and prevail. But if a Persian, or whosoever of the Gentiles, begin to fall before a Jew, he can neither stand nor rise. There is an invisible hand of omnipotency that striketh in for his own, and confounds their opposites.

For the fear of them fell upon all the people. This was the work, not of some Pan Deus Arcadie, but of God, the sole giver of victory, who, when he pleaseth, alighteth the Church’s enemies, as he

promiseth to do in many places. And as accordingly he did it on the Egyptians, Midianites, Philistines, Syrians, &c. And the like he did for Baldwin, king of Jerusalem, against the great Caliph; for the Hussites against all the force of Germany; for the Angrognians against the Pope's army that came against them.

Because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. But much more, because God himself over-awed them, and dispirited them. How else should he appear to be the God of the spirits of all flesh, and that in the thing wherein people deal proudly he was above them? How should they come to know themselves to be but men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit; if he did not

otherwhiles make their hearts heartless, their hands feeble, their eyes fail, and their knees knock together, as Belshazzar's did. How else would they ever be brought to bring presents unto him that ought to be feared? If Mordecai be feared, it is because God hath put a majesty upon him, and made him dreadful, as Abraham was likewise to Abimelech, David to Saul, the Baptist to Herod, our Saviour to the Pharisees, Paul and Silas to their persecutors. And this the Lord still doth, that he may dwell upon earth, in his faithful worshippers, which wicked men would not suffer, if not thus reined in and restrained. And, secondly, that praise may wait for him in Zion, and unto him may the vow be performed.—*Trapp.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSE 4.

THE GREATNESS OF GOODNESS.

This verse is given as a reason why the fear of Mordecai fell upon all the people. "For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater." It is given unto but few to attain unto that social and political greatness that was the possession of Mordecai: but many may become possessors of that goodness which was the foundation of Mordecai's greatness, and therefore we must speak of his goodness in order to inspire if possible a reasonable ambition. Let us strive to be good and noble, for this is true and lasting greatness. Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus.

I. Goodness is greatness. This is a truth which many may profess but which very few practise. The goodness of earth's great ones is admired; but goodness in earth's little ones is too often left unnoticed. However, goodness, wherever found—in cot or in palace—is not unnoticed by the good God. Mordecai was great because he was good. On this very account he rose to the highest position in the Persian empire. He was great in the king's house, not through political intrigue, not through the carrying out of any wily schemes, not on account of his gifts as an orator, but on account of his goodness. His faithfulness in a lowly sphere when he discovered and exposed a wicked conspiracy, his benevolent attachment to Esther, and his patriotic interest in his countrymen, were the reasons of his promotion. He did not follow the rules of goodness as being the way to earthly greatness. He did not act on the principle that gain is godliness. Let us aspire after the greatness of goodness. In lowly walks of life, without any sinister objects in view, without any thought that a virtuous course of conduct is the most prudent and the most profitable, let us move on in the pathway of goodness. Let a deep love of the Saviour be the all-compelling motive power. Let us have a supreme respect unto the recompense of the heavenly reward.

II. The greatness of goodness extends. Mordecai's fame went out throughout all the provinces. He was not little at home and great abroad, but he was great abroad because he was great at home. No man is a hero to his valet. But the

good man is a hero everywhere. Your earthly great ones are only great on large occasions and in public. The spiritually great are great in public, but their brightest glories shine out for the benefit of those who know them best. The common people heard the Saviour gladly; but that disciple whom Jesus loved saw the most of his Divine greatness and glory. Mordecai's light shone in the palace, but it could not be hid, and its clear rays shone out to the remotest provinces. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Oh for the light of that goodness which illumines and gladdens the home, and then extends itself in ever-widening and ever-increasing circles!

III. The greatness of goodness develops. This man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Mordecai was a growing man. We see his noble manliness developing day by day, and week by week. Goodness is the one quality which may be ever increasing and developing. Physical power can only be increased up to a certain point and for a certain period. Samson at last reaches the climax of mere physical prowess. Intellectual greatness has its limits. Even Solomon could only compass a certain amount of knowledge. Mordecai socially and politically could only wax greater and greater for a short period. But Mordecai morally and spiritually could wax greater and greater in indefinite spheres and through eternity. The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. We follow the just to the perfect day of the upper Paradise, but even there we see them waxing greater and greater. There is, we believe, growth in heaven—growth in knowledge and growth in holiness. However that may be, let all seek to grow on earth. Grow in grace is the Divine command. We must either, morally considered, go backward or forward. Not to grow is to decay. To decay is to die. Excelsior should be the Christian's watch-word. Onward and upward to the heights of holiness, of a more perfect mastery over self and the world, and a more complete likeness to the blessed Saviour.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSE 4.

"He was great." Ah, how that word "greatness" is often misused and debased! A man bears a certain name, and therefore he is great; or he wears a certain robe, and therefore he is great; or he succeeds in slaughtering an immense number of his fellow-creatures, and there he is great; or by much cunning, and audacity, and cleverness withal, he keeps himself in conspicuous places and before the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, and therefore he is great! Not such greatness as any of these was that of Mordecai. It was a greatness won, no doubt, by his splendid faculty of management, by his statesmanship, but with real substance in it of truth and goodness. He was great, not only as at the practical head of the government of this great empire of Persia, but he was so esteemed among "his own people," who were despised and persecuted as they so often have been, and who numbered not more than one in

thirty of the population. He "sought the wealth of his people." Jewish-like, no doubt, is this; but observe, it was his people's wealth, not his own, he sought. And the last word concerning him on record is this, that "he spake peace to all his seed." He was accessible, he was gentle, he was generous and patriotic, promoting the well-being of his seed, but not at the expense of the country in which he was born. Would that all who are in great place in our own country, and in this our own day, would follow very literally Mordecai's example and speak "peace."—*Ruleigh*.

Mordecai was great in the king's house. He was known to be a Jew, and deeply interested in the protection of his own people. He had shown his wisdom as well as his power in the decree which had been issued by him, and during the intervening months his greatness had been steadily on the increase. Whatever may have been the means taken by

him to exhibit this ever-augmenting greatness to the people, they were deeply impressed with it, not in Shushan only, but also "throughout all the provinces." No doubt his management of public business would be of a very different kind from that of his predecessor. There would be no self-seeking, no vacillation, no favouritism toward offenders, but justice and equity, influenced and dispensed with high religious principle. Nothing else but this will, in the long run, stand the scrutiny and verdict of public opinion. By degrees there is gathered around it a moral weight which cannot fail to be respected by good, and feared by wicked, men. It is a greatness which is at once the offspring and reward of virtue. The fame of Mordecai made the enemies of the Jews afraid, and fear would weaken energy. On the other side, the Jews had faith in him who had raised up and given to Mordecai this power and greatness in their emergency and peril; and this faith in God was the harbinger of victory, even as the fear of those who were hostile to them was the sure precursor of defeat. Faith would give calmness and courage, just as fear would occasion haste and hesitation. In this we have the secret how that, with lesser numbers, the Jews yet commanded greater power, and had, from the commencement of the conflict, the promise of success. "The fear of them fell upon all people."—*McEwen*.

The promotion of Mordecai must have soon produced a most important change in favour of the Jews. Mordecai was universally beloved and respected, as well by the Persians as by his own countrymen. On that memorable day when he went forth from the king's presence, and appeared for the first time in public, arrayed in the robes and golden tiara which belonged to his office, as chief minister of the Persian empire, we are told, that "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad:"—rejoiced, not only at its deliverance from the terror of the detested Haman, but because his successor was known to be a wise, and good, and unselfish man; a magistrate, from whom all might expect justice; a ruler, from whom all honest and well-

disposed persons would receive favour and protection. The advancement of such a man to supreme power, added to the surprising discovery that the queen herself was a Jewess, and the nearest relative of the new minister, must have operated everywhere to the advantage of the Jews.

That a wish to please and conciliate the favour of any one in Mordecai's station, would lead the provincial authorities to espouse the cause of the Jews, and to help them, both in preparing for their defence, and afterwards in resisting their enemies, is only what might have been expected. Mordecai had, in effect, the absolute government of nearly the whole civilized world in his hands. And as his virtue, his moderation, and his disinterested love of truth and goodness, became known and understood, his moral influence increased every hour. "Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater." Like Joseph and Daniel, his illustrious countrymen, his power was used for the good of others. His authority was exerted in behalf of truth and justice. And as the subordinate officers of government would necessarily take their tone from him, the whole weight and influence of his office and station would be sure to operate in favour of the Jews, and raise up for them powerful friends and protectors. And so we are informed, that they all "helped the Jews."

But besides; all reflecting persons must have felt, that the Jews were protected by a higher power. A revolution so sudden, so unlooked for, so unparalleled in history; a manifestation of Providence, more wonderful than any interposition, not absolutely miraculous, which this mysterious people had ever before experienced, coming, as it did, immediately after the public fastings and prayers with which they had cast themselves and their families upon the Divine mercy,—such a strange and singular combination of events must have produced a great and widely-extended conviction, that Heaven itself had interfered to save them. And this persuasion

must likewise have disposed many of the better and more thoughtful sort, to consider more attentively than heretofore, the claims of the religion of the Jews to be a revelation from the supreme God. Accordingly, we are informed by the sacred historian, that "many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them."—*Crosthwaite*.

At the time of the deliverance from Egypt and the entrance into Canaan, the Lord showed abundantly that he was able to make his people a great nation, despite the most powerful of their enemies. Now in its exile he again showed them, as for himself, he now no longer had need of them as a people, at least as a politically independent one. The great deeds that were then done were edifying and elevating in tendency; what he now did was momentous and instructive. It was plainly evident that he could accomplish his purpose aside from external means or political circumstances. It is still more manifest than it then was that it has pleased him to be powerful in those that are weak, and great in those who have little influence. In those

days he prepared as his instruments the chief persons and princes of his own people, who were in a special manner filled with the Spirit. Now, however, he employs instead, the satraps and governors of Persia, little as they were willing or fit for such work. Together with and among kings, such as Cyrus and Ahasuerus, they must also further God's purpose. There was a time when the Lord had caused fear and terror to fall upon the peoples before Israel, especially those who stood opposed in war, so that they fled from before them. Now, however, the princes and governors, who had great fear, were obliged to protect the rights of the subjects of the king, and thus they protected Israel. This corresponded entirely to his greatness. Therein is shown his claim as the God of all men. This is itself further evinced by the fact that if his people will only become more spiritual, as is his wish, and partake of his nature, he will by no means leave them fatherless. But the more spiritual his kingdom, *i. e.* his people, will become, the more will he assist them to arrive at truth, justice, and security throughout the world while in it.—*Lange*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 5—11.

THE FATE OF EVIL-DOERS.

JUSTICE ought to be tempered by mercy. But there may be a danger of degenerating into what we may call sentimentalism. We seem to see the working of this feeling in the present day. We would not deal harshly, but we must deal justly, with the criminal classes. We must have respect to the welfare of society as a great whole. In reading some of the Old Testament accounts of slaughters and battles, we must not follow our own modern feelings; and we must make all due and proper allowance for the difference of times and of dispensations. After all proper allowances have been made, there will still be about those accounts that which is to us inexplicable on modern and even New Testament principles. Here are great slaughters that may well appear to us very strange. However, the narrative does not warrant the assumption that there was anything vindictive on the part of Esther or Mordecai. The Jews slew in self-defence. They killed only the men; they did not kill for personal enrichment, for on the spoil laid they not their hand. Let us seek to gather instruction from the whole narrative.

I. The destruction of evil-doers. The enemies of the Lord and of the Lord's Church must meet with retribution sooner or later. The haters of the Jews were visited with slaughter and destruction. Even in the gospel dispensation it is written, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It is a

fearful thing for the hardened and the finally impenitent thus to fall. He that being often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. But Jesus Christ came to provide a way of escape from final destruction. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost. Thus, through Christ Jesus, the stroke of retribution may be averted. By his stripes penitent and believing sinners may be healed and saved. If, then, we would escape the ministers of vengeance, we must lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel. Let us at once lay hold on the blessed hope. Let us penitently bow at the foot of the cross. Let us believingly apply to the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

II. The infamy of evil-doers. The ten sons of Haman receive an unenviable notoriety. Their names are recorded and handed down to all the ages, and thus branded, as it were, with undying infamy. Far better to go down to the grave unknown than to occupy that place in history which is occupied by these ten men. Better still to go down to the grave along the pathway of righteous endeavour to keep God's commandments. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord. These ten men were damaged by parental influence, but we do not read that they made any effort to rise superior to the evil influence of their circumstances. It is sometimes very convenient to blame parents, and to blame our circumstances. The question will arise, Have we done the best we could in spite of our circumstances? Have we shown the noble sight of men bravely battling with and against adversity? Faithful endeavour cannot be altogether lost. Men will be judged according to their light, their opportunities, their circumstances, and their talents. Be wise in time.

III. The report of the fate of evil-doers. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace, was brought before the king. An account was kept. The report has a solemn voice. If strict accounts are kept on earth, strict accounts are kept in heaven. The dead, both small and great, must stand before God, and the books will be opened. Oh, who shall be able to stand when the books are opened? How very many would shrink from the exposure of the outward acts and the inward thoughts and feelings of one year of their sinful lives? What a dark scroll! Let me not brave the opening of the books in that great day. Let me, O my Saviour, find in that day that thy precious blood has been sprinkled upon the pages of the great book, and all the black record of my misdoings has been wiped clean away, and nothing is to be seen but clear pages. May I be found at last washed in the blood of the Lamb.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5—11.

It is one thing to take revenge of one's self, another to do so on the order of authority; not the latter, but the former, is forbidden. The simple command of a government will justify such an act only in so far as it is a guaranty against pure thirst for revenge. Everything here depends upon the disposition of mind. But we would certainly misjudge the temper of the then Jews, were we to assume that because the people were but a religious community, we are at liberty to apply a Christian standard to them. It would be unjust to deny them the privilege, which they as an independent people formerly en-

joyed, of rejoicing in a victory over their enemies; and it would be little to the purpose, if instead of aiming at their conversion, we acquiesced in their destruction. Instead of justifying the complaint that we do not pay sufficient regard to Old Testament national conditions, we must also remember that Old Testament saints could not well avoid often taking a stand-point opposed to their enemies, just as we are still allowed to assume a position at variance with those in enmity against God. Besides, we are not to forget that, for those who will not join themselves to the kingdom or people of God, whatever its form or

degree of development, this very hostility is a ground of condemnation. All things that cannot be employed for a good end will finally issue in destruction and extinction. This is still true, and will be true to the end of time. In the same manner even the angels in heaven could not have acted differently from Esther with regard to those enemies in the city of Shushan. We would be more just to Esther, to the Jews spoken of in our book, and to the book itself, if, in what was done in Shushan as well as in all Persia, we would see an anticipation of the judgments connected and paralleled with the progress of the kingdom of God on earth, and especially of the final judgment. If the animus of the Old Testament with respect to the destruction of enemies seems to us terribly vindictive, rather than mild, yet this may not only be excusable, but may even be a prophetic intimation. The fact, so prominently and emphatically expressed, in the present instance, that the Jews did not stretch out their hands after the goods (spoils) of their enemies, proves to us that they meant to conduct this contest as a measure of self-protection, or better, as a holy war, the sole purpose of which was the removal of their enemies.— *Lange.*

“This example, however, is set before us not that we should take it upon ourselves to avenge injuries, according to our own judgment, but that we may recognize the severity of the Divine wrath against the impious persecutor of the people of God, and that in persecution we might most confidently expect deliverance through faith, and be obedient to the calls of God.”—*Brenz.*

“This is written in admonition of parents, in order that they may be incited to cultivate piety, lest along with themselves they may also drag their children down into destruction. Such severity of God is stated in the Decalogue: ‘Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me.’”—*Brenz.*

We may learn from this part of the history how dangerous it is to enter on a wicked course, especially in concert

with others. Persons go on from evil to worse; they encourage one another in mischief. This is especially true as to those practices which originate in malice, as to which the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning, exerts a peculiar influence, in urging his children to the most violent extremes. “This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” But in addition to the considerations mentioned, we should stand in awe of the righteous judgment of God, who gives up wicked men to the uncontrolled corruption of their own hearts, and to the suggestions of the evil one, so that they often rush with their eyes open upon ruin. “Whom God means to destroy, he first infatuates.”

This was remarkably exemplified in the case before us. In spite of all the discouragements thrown in their way, and though heaven and earth both frowned upon them, the enemies of the Jews persisted in their hostile intentions, and assumed an offensive posture on the long looked-for day.—*M’Crie.*

It may appear strange that the Jews now found any enemies bold enough to contend with them in battle. The king was their friend, God was their friend, what could those expect who sought their lives, but destruction to themselves? It is indeed wonderful, but not uncommon, for men to value the gratification of their malignant passions above their best interests, and above their safety. At the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, it is well known that the Jews themselves did more mischief to one another, than all the harm they suffered from the fury of their conquerors. The different parties, when they found respite from the Romans, destroyed their provisions, and then brought upon themselves a famine, which destroyed them by thousands. But we need not look seventeen hundred years back to see the tyrannizing power of malice and hatred over the minds of men. Are there not many who subject themselves

to bitter remorse, to ruinous fines, or to an ignominious death? Are there not many more who subject themselves to the curse of God, merely to gratify their accursed spite against their fellow-men?

Many of the enemies of the Jews, doubtless, were overawed by the power of Mordecai, and either sat quiet in their dwellings, or joined with the Jews. Many chose rather to be quiet than to venture their lives in battle with enemies that were sure to be victorious. But there were others, not in small numbers, who chose to venture, or rather to sell their lives, and the lives of all that were dear to them, rather than lose the opportunity given them by law, of attempting to destroy a race of men whom, though innocent, they hated with a deadly hatred. These men combined in the different cities to fight against the Jews. But their confederacy was against the God of heaven, who spoiled them of their courage, and gave them into the hands of the Jews, to do to them as they would. They were so far from gaining their malicious purposes at the expense of their lives, that victory, and triumph to their hated enemies, were the fruit of their cruel attempt. Vain it is to fight against God, or against those whom he loves and protects. If God be against us, who can be for us? If we harden ourselves against the Almighty we cannot prosper. It were better for us to dash our heads against the craggy rock, than to rush upon the thick bosses of the buckler of the Almighty.

Why should men fight against God? And yet there are too many who fear not to carry the weapons of an unrighteous warfare against their Maker and their Judge. "Whatever ye have done, or not done, to one of the least of my brethren," says Christ, "ye have done, or not done, to me." Enmity against God himself; and surely "all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."

Even in Shushan the royal city, under the eye of the king, there were more than five hundred men that combined, in defiance of the king's known sentiments, to attack the Jews. But they meddled to their own hurt. When we

consider the audacity of that behaviour, to which their malice prompted them, we see that Mordecai had too much reason to tell Esther that she would not be safe in the king's palace, if she did not intercede with the king. The men that could take the pretence of a law to attack the Jews to their certain destruction, might have been prompted by the same outrageous malice to attack Esther in the palace, when they could plead the king's authority for the enterprise.

These five hundred men in Shushan, who sold their lives in this desperate cause, were doubtless some of Haman's creatures, who had learned from him to hate the Jews with a bloody hatred. Haman's ten sons were at the head of them, and shared in their fate. They were doubtless trained up by their father in the hatred of that nation, and his miserable end, instead of opening their eyes, irritated their resentment to their own destruction.

It was natural, some will say, for Haman's sons to account that people their enemies, by the means of whom their father suffered an ignominious death. It was natural, it must be confessed; but it does not follow that it was right. Children are to honour their parents while they live, and venerate their memory when they are dead, but not to follow their example in anything that is evil. The children of wicked parents ought to remember, that their Maker must have the precedency to all other duties; and that to rebel against God, because their parents rebelled against him, is not more excusable than for a man to be a thief, or a traitor, or an adulterer, because his father was so before him. God commanded his people, when they were carried away captives for their transgression, to confess their own iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers. The holy son of the wicked Ahaz made a full confession of the sins committed by his father, and by the people under his influence, and deserved high praise for reversing all his wicked institutions. Jeroboam had only one son in his house who discovered a dislike of his father's conduct, and was the only member of the family who died in peace.

"Fill ye up the measure of your fathers," said Jesus to the Jews; warning them that their fathers' example would be so far from justifying their wicked conduct, that the vengeance of Heaven was brought the nearer them, that their sins were but a continuation of the sins of their progenitors.

Parents, pity your children, if you will not pity yourselves. You know what force the example and influence of parents have. If you profess bad principles, you of course train up your children in the profession of the same. If you openly practise wickedness, you teach your children to practise it likewise. Thus you pull down vengeance, not only upon yourselves, but upon your houses. You see that Haman was the enemy of the Jews, and of the God of the Jews, and the punishment of his wickedness fell heavy, not only on himself, but upon all his family, which was probably rooted out of the earth. His sons might have been suffered to live in obscurity, if they had been willing to live peaceably. But they had drunk deep of their father's spirit, and followed his example, and ten (probably all of them) perished on that fatal day, on which their father, a few months before, had hoped to feast his eyes with the blood of those whom he chose to account his enemies.—*Larson*.

But on the spoil laid they not their hand.—Lest the king should be damned, or themselves justly taxed of covetousness and cruelty. "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." This is oft-repeated in this chapter, to their great commendation; that, although by the king's grant they might have taken the spoil, yet they did it not. 1. To show that they were God's executioners, not thieves and robbers. 2. To gratify the king for his courtesy towards them by leaving the spoil wholly to his treasury. 3. It is not unlikely, saith an interpreter, that Mordecai and Esther had admonished them how ill Saul had sped with the spoil of the Amalekites,

and Achan with his wedge of gold, which served but to cleave his body and soul asunder, and his Babylonish garment, which proved to be his winding-sheet.—*Trapp*.

Notwithstanding, the worst passions of some had been roused, and neither the king's wish nor the awe of Mordecai availed to restrain them. In the capital, five hundred men, led by Haman's ten sons, threw away their lives in the attempt to injure the Jews. It is not easy to pity them. If they had ceased from hating their neighbours and resisting God they would have been safe; but when they would not, there was nothing left but to kill them. In the rest of the provinces seventy-five thousand persons perished in the same way. An accurate report must have been gathered by the prime minister, now Mordecai, of the result in each city. The victory was uniform and complete from India to Ethiopia. The lesson of God's care over his people was thus taught over the known world in one day, and with greatly more effect than if an equal number of enemies had fallen under the walls of Jerusalem. And another lesson was taught by the unlooked-for self-restraint of the peculiar people. "But on the spoil laid they not their hands." You can imagine the widows and weak ones who were left in the houses of the foolhardy, after covering in terror of massacre, or worse, all through the thirteenth of Adar, and perhaps the next day also, at length beginning to breathe freely. "How strange these Jews are! They care not for spoil, they insult us not, they rob us not, they have no revenge; they can fight,—that is proved,—but they fight only for liberty to live and worship their God." Yes; the whole transaction was ordained to vindicate the right of God's people to live as such on his earth; and this was all the more effectively done when the humane and unworldly character of their religion was so strikingly manifested.—*Symington*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 12—16.

THE RIGOUR OF JUSTICE.

Justice is stern, and in the course of justice none of us should see salvation. This is one of the glories of the new dispensation, that we may live under the reign of mercy, and not under the reign of justice. However, mercy must not be permitted to induce the spirit of presumption. If mercy harden, justice will be allowed to do its severe work. The prospect of mercy must lead to penitence, to faith, to renewed consecration, in order that the stroke of justice may be averted. In this paragraph let us see Esther as the personification of justice, and thus notice—

I. Justice works by striking terror. The proceedings of the Jews on this occasion were calculated to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies. Five hundred men slain in Shushan the palace, Haman's ten sons destroyed, the leaders of the movement against the Jews were all slaughtered. Thus a panic was spread amongst all those who had shown themselves the Jews' enemies. Justice works by terror. It is so under human rule. It is so under Divine rule. Society seeks to restrain the criminal by fear. But this can never be a permanently renovating power. It is by the indwelling force of Divine love that the evil must be extirpated. God's method of law and of justice in the old dispensation must give place to the brighter and surer method of love and mercy in the new dispensation. It is highly fitting that the dispensation which was to be permanent, which is for all races, should be one of mercy, and of love, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

II. Justice pursues to the bitter end. Haman's ten sons are slain, and then they are hanged upon the gallows. The Jews stood for their lives, and slew seventy and five thousand. Justice demands the uttermost farthing. It says, "Pay me what thou owest." It takes the penniless debtor and casts him into prison, there to lie until all the debt be paid. Justice is an exact accountant. Escape there cannot be from the stern grasp of justice except by the interposition of a higher power. Justice and mercy are harmonized in the cross of the blessed Saviour.

III. Justice makes a distinction. These Jews slew only their foes. They did not proceed on the method of indiscriminate slaughter. They do not appear to have touched inoffensive women and helpless children. They did not even confiscate to themselves the property of their foes. Divine justice will be exact in its distinctions. It will judge between the good and the bad, and also between bad and bad. One servant will receive many stripes, and another the few.

IV. The administrators of justice have rest when the appointed work is accomplished. The Jews had rest from their enemies. The open enemies were destroyed. The concealed enemies were afraid. There was security, if not absolute safety, to the Jewish nation. How blessed that word rest to these once persecuted, fighting, and now triumphant Jews. Rest, after all their fears and forebodings! Rest, after all their awful but necessary work of bloodshed! The warriors find rest. The statement implies that these Jews did not find supreme delight in the butchery and blood-shedding of man. They were not warriors by trade and by desire, but by the stern necessity which has no law. Sweet and welcome to them the rest after long and bitter months of fear and anxiety. To all those who fight against the enemies of the Lord there is the sure prospect of rest. Every Christian has such enemies. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," &c. But rest will come ere long. Sweet rest in heaven; Divine repose in the Father's house. The soul of the believer pants for rest in this world of

strife and turmoil. Rest from moral enemies. Rest from the strife of tongues. Rest from foes without, and fears within. Lord God, give us to taste the pure rest of heaven.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—16.

If she had been put upon her defence for this act, she might have urged that love for her countrymen and love for her religion, prompted her to deal thus toward the fierce enemies of both. And we shall not question the fact, that it was by these feelings she was chiefly animated, and not by the desire of revenge alone. But it must be remembered, that although this furnishes a sufficiently satisfactory explanation of her conduct, it does not justify it. It has ever been under the pretext of zeal for truth, that the fires of religious persecution have been kindled. Under this plea, for example, Popery has shed the blood of the righteous like water, and even in Protestant countries pains and penalties have been inflicted upon those who refused to adopt the form of religion patronized by the state. Intolerance has always had its arguments in self-defence; but these do not serve for its vindication. And so in the case before us, we believe most assuredly that Esther acted in all good conscience, as also did Mordecai, by whom very probably she was instructed what to do on the occasion. Yet this hinders not our regretting that she was hurried away by the spirit of revenge, rather than moved by what would have become her better—the mild and sweet influence of a forgiving heart. In defence of her religion and her people she suffered herself to act with unbecoming zeal. I would take occasion to observe here, that the great principle of toleration in religion is still imperfectly understood, and in many parts of what is called Christendom, as imperfectly practised. The principle is utterly to be repudiated, that man is not responsible to God for unbelief. He is responsible, as Christ's words imply, when he says that men "love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." But on the other hand, this other principle is ever to be maintained and urged, that man is

not responsible to his fellow-man, either for his belief or unbelief, and that pains and penalties to enforce religious conformity are altogether indefensible. That there is a limit to be affixed to the publication of opinions which are blasphemous, revoltingly immoral, or licentious, and subversive of all order and government, is a proposition which very few will call in question. The well-being of society demands that care be taken lest its very foundations be undermined by men whose heart is set in them to do evil. But to punish any one for holding particular views of Divine truth, or for refusing to conform to the belief and practice of the majority, is manifestly wrong. If no other arguments could be advanced for the assumption and exertion of a power to compel uniformity, these two would be sufficient: that the application of external force in matters of religion implies that those who have recourse to it must deem themselves infallible, which no man, or class of men, can rightly do; and that it evidently supposes that the claims and evidences of true religion are not so powerful of themselves as to be able without external or temporal aid to secure the approval of those to whom they are addressed. Let us hope that the world and the Church also will come to understand better than either has done hitherto, the reverence which is due to the inalienable rights of conscience, when these are pled for.—*Davidson*.

On the other side of the account this—that with emphasis it is stated that in Shushan the palace, in a great city, they slew 500 *men*. Twice it is said they slew *only men*. They were allowed to slay women and children. But as this was not necessary to their own preservation, they took the course dictated by humanity and mercy. And this stands well to their credit.

It might seem perhaps to some that

Esther herself was lacking in this humanity, when, using her great influence over her uxorious husband, and in reply to his desire to know what *now* she wished further done, assuring her that her wish should immediately be royal command—she asked not only that Haman's sons should be hanged—but that there might be *another* day of slaughter added to the first. One very vigorous objector speaks of it as “another day of butchery in the palace.” But that is mere excess and exaggeration. The whole meaning of Esther's prayer is that the Jews might be allowed to continue the defence for another day, since the assault had not yet ceased.

The request was wholly reasonable, and it was at once granted. It was only in the palace, *i. e.* in the capital city, that this was necessary; throughout the provinces of the empire the fighting began and ended on the same day.—*Raleigh.*

We would give prominence to this circumstance, because some have been disposed to charge the Jews with a vindictive and merciless spirit in the conduct of this war—especially for the purpose of lowering the estimate which we have formed, and endeavoured to present, of the character of Esther, in not being satisfied with one day's slaughter, but asking the king, when the opportunity was given her, that it should be continued on the following day, and that the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons should be suspended on the gallows. If there is the appearance of severity in this, it is difficult to see that it was not warranted and necessary for the future peace of the Jews in Persia. The Jews were simply acting on their own defence. They were not the aggressors. If their enemies had wished to be let alone, they had nothing to do but to let them alone; and having risen to exterminate them, they could hardly complain if they should be themselves exterminated. To have the war prolonged over another day, on which the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons should be seen hanging on the gallows, must not be viewed in the light of pleasure in bloodshed and cruelty, but rather

what was needful to protect the Jews against future trouble and single-handed resistance of assault, and, as has been suggested, “to deter other councillors, at any time, from abusing the king with false representations.” Many of the ringleaders may have escaped on the first day. They may have secreted themselves in houses, or fled to the suburbs, knowing that the decrees only extended over one day. They would be enraged more than ever against the Jews, and might concert measures for private revenge. Unprotected households would not be free from invasion and spoliation. The work was not completed. But let there be a second day, accompanied with the terrible spectacle of the scaffold with its ten victims, and there would be less likelihood of any future uprising against the Jews. Moreover, we must look at the retribution on the Divine as well as the human side. If these enemies of the Jews were chiefly Amalekites, they lay under the righteous sentence of the Almighty, whose word could not fail of accomplishment. They were bitterly opposed, not only to the people of God, but to God himself, and would have rooted out his name from the earth along with those who feared and worshipped him. Mordecai and Esther were only instruments in his hand; and in the execution of the Divine purpose, and the fulfilment of prophecy, we do not find anything in their conduct which can fairly be ascribed to personal vindictiveness and vengeance, but only necessary, though severe, expedients for the protection and honour of an unjustly persecuted and reproached people. Far be it from us to ascribe the results of all war, even of defence, to the judgment of God; but when it is distinctly pointed out, in the Word of God, and though the causes should be veiled in mystery, we can only bow before his throne, saying: “Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.”

But whilst much may be urged on the side of the Jews, Mordecai, and Esther, to clear them from the charge of vindictiveness and cruelty, we have a thrice-recorded declaration with regard to their

clemency. They had a right to take the property of their enemies for a spoil. The clause in Haman's edict to this effect had been incorporated in Mordecai's; but both with reference to the five hundred who were slain at Shushan on the thirteenth of the month, and the three hundred who were slain on the following day, as well as the seventy-five thousand who were slain in the provinces, we have this declaration—a declaration all the more praiseworthy and remarkable when we consider the proverbial love of gain ascribed to the Jews,—that “they laid not their hands on the prey.” Just suppose that the enemies of the Jews had been victorious, and had carried out the letter of Haman's decree on all those whom they destroyed, what a sad record should we have had! Not the men only who were actually engaged in the conflict were to have been slain, but women and children also, and their whole goods were to be taken. If Haman's ten sons had got their own way, we may be sure that they would not in any particular have restricted their father's will. They would have been deaf to the pleadings of mothers and the frightened cries of little children, and would not have spared the property. In contrast with this the conduct of the Jews, Mordecai, and Esther, was merciful and humane. They only slew those who had taken arms against themselves; and, as regards the property, though they had authority to take it, yet did they not appropriate anything. The wives and children of such as were slain would have need of it. They would show that it was not a war of self-aggrandisement, malice, or covetousness, but a conflict forced upon them for their own preservation. If it had been vengeance which they sought in the second day's conflict and the hanging of Haman's sons, they had an opportunity of taking it in a far more effectual and grievous manner; but what

they wanted was simply present safety, and some guarantee for the future. They stopped there, and by their conduct set a notable example to contending nations. All war is to be deplored; but more deplorable still, the reckless waste of the property of the vanquished. In certain cases it may be necessary in order to obtain terms of peace, but when it is wanton and revengeful it must receive the just censure of every generous heart. By letting alone the spoil, which must have been great, and which they might easily have seized and legally claimed, the Jews must have commended themselves to the peaceable and right-minded of the population of Persia,—“but they laid not their hands on the prey.”—*McEwen*.

Let it be granted to the Jews, &c. The enemies at Shushan could not be all caught the first day; lest those that harked should hereafter prove troublesome to the Church by hatching new plots, she begs that they also may receive condign punishment. And Haman's sons are hanged up for example. This she requested not out of any private and personal spleen to any, but for the glory of God and the Church's peace. Had her aims been otherwise than good, her good actions could not have showed her a good woman. For, though a good aim doth not make a bad action good, as we see in Uzzah; yet a bad aim maketh a good action bad, as we see in Jehu. Lavater's note may not here be let slip: the diligence that Esther used in rooting out her temporal enemies should quicken us to do the like to our spiritual, viz. those evil affections, motions, and passions, that war against the soul. These be our Medes and Persians, with whom we must make no truce, but maintain a constant deadly feud, till we have mastered and mortified them all, for till that be done effectually we must never look to have true peace, either within ourselves or with others.—*Trapp*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 17—28.

A NATIONAL MEMORIAL.

There are some who appear to frown upon all national memorials, as savouring of the Old Testament dispensation, and as belonging to the childhood of the race. But all childishness has not been yet eliminated from humanity. And we do not know that it would be well for us to put away all that belongs to the child-nature. Our Saviour teaches that we must become as little children. If the custom of observing national memorials belongs to primitive and less enlightened ages it is certainly one that does not easily pass away. We see no reason why it should. The family has its memorials, the nation has its memorials. All religions, the simplest as well as the most elaborate, have their memorials. They are founded upon the instincts of our humanity. They serve most useful purposes. They tend to keep alive the memory of great public events in a way that could not be so successfully accomplished by any other method. This national memorial of the Purim has not been without its beneficial influences.

I. This national memorial was established by supreme authority. Mordecai was now the prime minister, and he wrote these things and sent letters to establish this among them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly. This was done on the concurrence of Esther the queen and Ahasuerus the king. Those that are in high places in the kingdom should set themselves to establish wise customs and salutary memorials. Such a custom and such a memorial was that of the feast of Purim. Even modern rulers are not always wise in this respect. They ought to be cautious in all their proceedings. Let them not establish any memorial, nor sanction any custom, that does not tend to the welfare of the people. Let them remember how the influence of those in high places percolates through all classes of society, and acts either injuriously or beneficially. How awfully responsible is the position of those who are placed on high either in Church or in State! Well may we earnestly pray for God's guidance and blessing to and upon all the great ones of earth.

II. This national memorial was approved by a grateful people. The Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them. We can easily understand and picture to ourselves the gratitude of these people on account of their great deliverance, and how readily they would concur in the establishment of this feast of Purim. Happy is it when rulers find a ready response to a wise decision in the feelings of their subjects. Decrees and customs in order to be permanently beneficial must be heartily received by an enlightened and virtuous people. And if the people do not at first readily receive, and do not see the propriety of any measure, they must be taught and educated up to the proper standard. It may be correct that some few of the Jewish elders objected to this memorial. But this is only what often occurs. Where was the good custom and good doctrine yet that did not meet with opponents? However, we must hold on our way till all enemies are overcome. If the thing be good and true it must finally stand and be victorious. Be sure you are right, and then stand to the right in the face of all enemies, and triumph must ultimately arrive.

III. This national memorial was sanctioned by the marvellous nature of the events celebrated. These were the days when the Jews rested from their enemies, and this was the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day. Here was fitting reason for celebration. Well might they feel grateful for the great benefits conferred. These events were marvellous. The deliverance could only have been effected by Divine interposition. They would not merely celebrate the fact that a month of expected sorrow was

turned into a month of joy, but also the marvellous manner by which it was brought about. We too may celebrate the month which has been turned for us from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to a good day, and the marvellous manner by which it was accomplished. We have our Christmas memorial which rings its joy bells through time, and tells the advent of our great Deliverer. We have our Good Friday memorial which rings its mournful and yet hopeful sounds. We have our Easter memorial which tells of the once crucified but now risen and triumphant Redeemer. Let us penitently and believingly celebrate these great events of Gospel history.

IV. This national memorial was hallowed by the manner of its celebration. They were to be days of feasting and joy, but not we presume of gluttony and of drunkenness. This is too often the modern notion of feasting, and modern fashion of observing festal occasions. Very, very sad it is to see that our most sacred religious festivals are desecrated by extravagant and sinful licentiousness. Religious people must check this not by ascetic ansterity but by joy. It was a month of joy. Let us show that moderation and religious sobriety are helpful to a joy that is lasting and that spreads itself through all life's trials and difficulties. But the most attractive part of this celebration is found in the fact that it was a time of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. What a wide diffusion of happiness! What a season for the expansion of the spirit of benevolence! What a time for the holy enlargement of the nature! Here is a blessed communism that cannot be productive of evil results! It is to all a celestial feast. The rich taste the luxury of doing good. The poor taste the rich wine of benevolence. The rich sent both to the rich and the poor, and thus the poor are not pauperized. They do not lose a sense of their proper manhood.

V. This national memorial was preserved by a wise method. The Jews took methods to have this feast of Purim made known and observed to and by every family, every province, every city, and every generation. Here we have on this subject home-missionary work. Let us teach our own people. The Jews may be considered as too exclusive. However, while we look to the nations beyond we must not neglect our own nation. In these days we may reasonably feel that our own beloved nation is not growing more religious. How vast the heathenism of our large towns and cities! Yea, how much of ignorance in our rural districts! Here we have our duty towards the children enforced. The seed are to be instructed. The institution is to be made known from generation to generation. It is by the wise and prayerful training of children that we must hope to improve the nation, and leave behind a better and more glorious England than that which we found. Let us gird ourselves afresh to the holy and benevolent enterprise.

VI. This national memorial is perpetuated with a good result. These days of Purim had not failed from among the Jews, nor has the memorial of them perished from their seed. However much the Jews may be degenerated in the manner in which they celebrate this memorial, yet the fact that it is celebrated speaks to us of the antiquity and authenticity of these wonderful records. The public observance of certain customs is a more convincing argument and a more powerful and more easily understood demonstration than the ablest books on the evidences. A memorial does not require much studying. A book requires much studying, and sometimes in certain classes of minds raises more doubts than it settles. We do not under-rate good books. Both books and memorials have their place. Let us wisely perpetuate good institutions. Let each one raise the irresistible memorial of a holy life. This can never be refuted. Ye are our epistles. Oh that the Lord would write more and more of these glorious epistles.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 17—28.

And of sending portions one to another. To the rich they sent in courtesy, to the poor in charity, and both these to testify their thankfulness to God for their lives, liberties, and estates, so lately and graciously restored unto them.—*Trapp.*

We can well receive or retain good church ceremonies, if only they are not opposed to the Word of God, in view of our Christian freedom. Even the holidays ordered by the authorities of one's country should be celebrated in a becoming manner.—*Starke.*

The festivals that the people of the Lord as such celebrate, have quite a different purpose from those of heathendom. Ahasuerus aimed to show the riches of his glorious kingdom. God's people desire first of all to praise God's grace. They would give thanks for the gifts bestowed upon them. They would secure and keep what they already had by rendering thanks and praise to God as its author. Theirs are feasts of gratitude. Hence these also have a different character from the others. The pious cannot manifest their spirit of gratitude to God for all his benefits without also proving this by benefaction to their brethren in the faith. The love of God has kindled love to their fellows in their hearts; this would prove itself in deeds of kindness and benevolence. They would confess their allegiance to God as to one mild and kindly; they would else deny him were they not to give way, on their part, to mildness and kindness. Their festivals, therefore, are seasons of refreshing, but especially so to the poorer brethren among them. At the same time there is joined to their spirit of rejoicing one of great seriousness. They cannot enjoy their deliverance without also looking back upon the sorrows that preceded it. They can only appreciate the former by taking a full view of the latter. They do not forget that though salvation is theirs, still there are even yet abundant cause for sorrow and grief. The chief cause of this is the remains of sin in

them. As the Mazzoth (unleavened) days are followed by the serious Paschal sacrifice, and as the joy of the feast of tabernacles is preceded by the repentance of the fast of the day of atonement, so also here the joyous feast of Purim is connected in a preparation of fasting and mourning. In eternity also will this transition hold true.—*Lange.*

Now the feast of Purim was to be observed. And of this let us see—

I. What was here enjoined, which was very good, that they should make it—1. A day of cheerfulness, a day of feasting and joy; and a feast was made for laughter. When God gives us cause to rejoice, why should we not express our joy? 2. A day of generosity, sending portions one to another, in token of their pleasantness and mutual respect, and their being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love. Friends have their goods in common. 3. A day of charity, sending gifts to the poor. It is not to our kinsmen and rich neighbours only that we are to send tokens, but to the poor and the maimed. Those that have received mercy must, in token of their gratitude, show mercy; and there never wants occasion, for the poor we have always with us. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that, when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us, and their loins may bless us.

II. What was added to this, which was much better. They always, at the feast, read the whole story over in the synagogue each day, and put up three prayers to God: in the first of which they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this Divine service; in the second they thank him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third they praise him that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it. So Bishop Patrick.

III. What it has since degenerated to, which is much worse. Their own writers acknowledge that this feast is

commonly celebrated among them in gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Talmud says expressly, that in the feast of Purim a man should drink till he knows not the difference between *Cursed be Haman* and *Blessed be Mordecai*. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to which was at first well-intended; here is a religious feast turned into a carnival, a perfect revel, as wakes are among us. Nothing more purifies the heart and adorns religion than holy joy; nothing more pollutes the heart and reproaches religion than carnal mirth and sensual pleasure. What is best becomes, when corrupted, the worst.—*Matthew Henry*.

The celebration of the victory necessarily took place on different days in the city of Shushan and in the provinces. As there were two days of slaughter in Shushan, the triumph was not celebrated till the fifteenth day; but as in the lesser cities and villages of the empire, the permission granted by the king of a second day was not known, it was celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar. They rested from labour. Some must have been in mourning; for, though no mention is made of the losses of the Jews in the fierce warfare, it is too much to suppose that they could all have escaped. But even those who had suffered the loss of relatives and friends would find compensation for it in the great and general deliverance which had been wrought, and would hardly refrain from joining with their kinsfolk and neighbours in their joy. They feasted one with another, and gave expression to the gladness which filled their hearts in thanksgiving and praise. The day was observed as "a good day," not in the sense of mere worldly mirth and jollity; but, along with "feasting and gladness," there would be the remembrance of the Lord, who had so marvelously and mightily interposed for their own preservation and the destruction of their enemies. The Jews were always ready to give God the praise of their success in war, and as, in this instance, they had sought the Lord in their perplexity and sorrow, so would they now yield to him the glory of their triumph.

In proof of their gratitude to him they extended their generosity to the poor, and such as were not in circumstances to make a feast for themselves. They sent "portions one to another"—meat from their tables to such as were in need,—that no one might be wanting in the means of enjoyment. Even to the present day, the Jews have a rule, that a collection of money should be made, at this time of the year, for the benefit of the poor, that they may provide for themselves the things necessary to make a feast. Verily, that is "a good day" on which the hearts of the people of God are warmed with gratitude and praise to him who is the dispenser of all good, and feel themselves so bound together as to be interested in the supply of each other's wants and comforts. After a different fashion from this the world celebrates its victories. It may expend large sums of money in the roar of cannon and magnificent display, whilst the poor are left struggling in penury and want. But the Church of God, through all her members, should feel knit one to another by the ties of a common kindred and fraternal affection, prompting kindness to the poor and the suffering, and an honest benevolence for their relief. In our feasting and gladness, because of some signal victory in providence, we should remember those who, on account of their need, cannot rejoice with us in our joy. So are we now presented with a scene which is widely separated from the world—men regarding themselves as members of the same family, concerned for each other's happiness, ministering to each other's wants, and as though surrounding a common table:—"A day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another."

Now, it does appear strange that the people of God should be represented here and elsewhere in Scripture—notably after the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea—rejoicing over the slaughter and destruction of thousands of their fellow-creatures. One might have supposed that the scene would rather have been contemplated with subdued silence and regret. If the

rejoicing was occasioned simply by the satisfaction afforded by national and personal revenge, it would only have merited reproof; but when we reflect that these same feelings of jubilation and gladness are shared in and loudly expressed by the redeemed in heaven, at the overthrow of God's enemies, we touch upon a very solemn and awful aspect of the subject. The will of man becomes so thoroughly harmonized and identified with the will of God, as actually to rejoice in the darkest providences and heaviest judgments. We cannot now, indeed, venture to interpret all events, which are beneficial to ourselves and disastrous to others, as the judgment of God upon them for our sakes. It was different in the days of the prophets, when a Divine intimation was given to this effect. But the redeemed will have such a clearness of apprehension in this respect as shall prevent the possibility of mistake. Accordingly, in the terrible events of the latter days, and in the final judgment itself, they are depicted in the Book of Revelation as bursting forth into song and rejoicing in the God of judgment. Most thoroughly do they identify their own cause with God's glory, and are constrained to rejoice over all which promotes the exhibition of it. As the judgments of God upon his enemies, as well as his goodness toward his people, are for the manifestation of his glory, they are moved thereby to adoring song. The tempest moves our adoration of God as well as the calm; the thunder, roaring among the mountains, as well as zephyr breezes gently shaking the leaves of the forest; the whirlwind, with its terror, as well as the dew with its refreshing. And when we pass from the physical to the moral, it is only our present sympathy with sin which leads us to rejoice more in God, in those dealings which are smooth and pleasant, than in those which are crushing and retributive.

There is nothing which so fills the believing soul with adoration as the cross of Christ. There do we see the flood-gates of Divine wrath opened wide, that the penalty of sin may be exhausted on our Divine Surety and Redeemer.

And because that stupendous interposition was for the fullest display of the Divine perfections and glory, we surround that cross with our praises.

What we now see, however, only as through a glass, darkly, the redeemed see clearly in the light of immortality; so that, when those who are at deadly war with God upon the earth, who have spurned at offered mercy, and turned a deaf ear to all the entreaties of redeeming love, and who would deny the name of God, and bid defiance to his government, are met by the Lord of Hosts on their own terms, and utterly discomfited, it cannot be wondered at that the redeemed, who had pleaded for this very thing upon the earth, and waited for it in hope in heaven, should join their hearts and voices in the praise of God. There must have been something resplendent and mighty in the angels who fell, and were cast out of heaven; but yet, on the putting down of this rebellion in their ranks, there must have been joy and gladness in the breasts of those who stood firm in their allegiance to God and holiness. And when the wicked are at last destroyed, and consigned to their own place, the regrets of the redeemed at the absence of some whom they had known upon the earth shall be silenced, and more than counterbalanced, in the maintenance of God's throne, and the uneclipsed splendour of his glory. We have our war-songs, recording our victories in battle, and delight in singing them; and shall it not be that the followers of the Lamb shall find delight in singing those songs which shall record the Redeemer's triumph over sin and Satan, and all his and our enemies?

Ah! the thought of that day does involve contingencies and consequences which we cannot help now contemplating with fear and trembling. It shall be the celebration of the grandest victory which perhaps the universe shall ever have witnessed. But on which side shall we individually stand? In every Amalekite's and enemy's home through the Persian empire there would be lamentation and mourning during those days when the Jews were jubilant; and whilst the redeemed are rejoicing in the

victory of their Lord, and their own triumph through faith in his name, in the ranks of the wicked and finally lost there shall only be weeping and wailing, remorse and despair. It is now left for us to determine whether or no we are on the Lord's side. The opportunity is given to us, and according to the improvement which we make of it shall be our place and portion on that great and terrible day of the Lord. To be numbered among the redeemed, and have a part in the celebration of their victory, should be enough to fire our ambition, quicken our zeal, and call into action all our energies. Then shall that day, with all its terrors and partings, be to us "a day of joy and gladness, and a good day."—*McEwen*.

As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. All things work together for good to the people of God, by promoting their happiness, as well as their holiness. Their toils sweeten the rest which succeeds them. The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, although he should sup sparingly before he retires to rest. The tears which the Christian must often shed are remembered with joy, when they are wiped away by returning prosperity. Mordecai wished the Jews to be ever mindful of their sorrows, that their joy might be full.

The days of Purim were intended to be days of feasting and gladness. In the season of their distress they would scarcely be able to eat that bread which was necessary to the preservation of their life; when they thought of their deliverance, and of the mercy of God in their deliverance, they would eat their bread with gladness, and drink their wine with a merry heart.

These days were to be "days of sending portions one to another." Their common danger and their common deliverance would endear them one to another, and open their hearts to mutual kindness. How much more ought our

common salvation by Christ from our general misery bind the hearts of Christians to one another! We were all involved in guilt and ruin by sin, and the same sin was the source of misery to us all. We are all redeemed by the same precious blood; we are all saved by the same Almighty arm. Let our common joy in Christ's salvation overflow in mutual love. If we are penetrated with the love of Christ, will we not love all those who are the objects of the same exceeding riches of grace?

"Sending of gifts to the poor," was to be another of the duties of this happy day. There might be many poor Jews who were not able to afford an entertainment for this day of joy. But Mordecai would have the poor rejoice as well as the rich. Although we find our circumstances unprosperous, we must not, on that account, reckon that we have no right, or that we are not bound, to rejoice in public mercies. That the poor may not be tempted to repine when others rejoice, as if they were cut off from the public happiness, we should be ready to communicate to them a share of our blessings, especially when our hearts overflow with joy in God's goodness to ourselves. Why should the rich eat their morsel alone, whilst others are pining with hunger? If you desire the continuance of your own happiness from Divine mercy, endeavour to diffuse it by wise liberality. Every expression of Divine goodness to ourselves is a new obligation laid upon us to do good, to those especially who have most need of our bounty. Above all, the redemption by Christ binds us to be merciful.*

And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them. They cheerfully promised to comply with Mordecai's wishes, both from a regard to his authority, and from a lively sense of the mercy bestowed upon them. It is a happy thing when superiors require nothing from their inferiors but what themselves see to be just and reasonable.

Mordecai's letters could not but have a mighty influence upon a nation who were indebted to him for their lives.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

He could not be blamed for bringing them into the dangers which they had escaped, because it was his steadfast adherence to his duty which provoked Haman's wrath. But he deserved no less praise than Esther herself for their preservation. Gratitude will induce us to do many things for those who have been the instruments of preserving our lives. What shall we render to the Author of our lives, and to him who hath redeemed our lives from destruction?

Because Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them. The remembrance of Haman's fearful plot against all the Jews powerfully instigated them to observe those days of joy that were appointed by Mordecai. When they considered how formidable the enemy was, and how bent upon their destruction, they could not think of their deliverance without surprise, and joy, and thankfulness.

It would be useful to us for increasing our joy in the Lord, to think upon those enemies of the Church that have often brought her into extreme dangers, that we may see the glory of that grace and power to which she is indebted for existence. If we think upon the Pharaohs, the Hamans, the Sennacheribs, the Antiochuses, the Diocletians, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, that have opened their mouths like dragons to swallow up the people of God, will we not see good reason still to sing that song of ancient times? "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say; many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me."

Haman was the cause of much terror to the Jews, but this terror ended in triumphs and joyful feasts. Unhappy are the enemies of the people of God. They labour for the profit of those whom they hate. Amongst those things that are made subservient to the advantage of the people of God, are to be ranked all the devices of their most malicious

enemies, Satan himself, their greatest enemy, not excepted. Sennacherib was a tremendous enemy of Judah, and struck terror into the minds of the most valiant of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. But what was the event of his formidable invasion? Disgrace and ruin to himself, gladness and joyful feasts to the Jews; as Isaiah foretold, when he was marching along in all the pride of his heart at the head of his innumerable army, collected from his extended dominions: "They had a song, as in the night, when an holy assembly is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty One of Israel."

But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. In Mordecai's letters he puts the Jews in mind, not only of Haman's plot against them, but of the means also by which it was disconcerted. Let us observe and call to mind the procedure of the providence of God in the works which he accomplishes for his Church, or for ourselves in particular. Every step of his going of majesty deserves to be remarked and admired. They are all beautified with wisdom and grace.

Who could have expected that Esther, whom the king had not desired to see for thirty days, should obtain such favour in his eyes as to turn his wrath against his favourite Haman, whose face he saw every day with smiles? Yet, when Esther came before the king, the mischief of Haman was turned upon himself, and he and his sons were hanged on the gallows. Let us do our duty, and leave the consequence to God. Without the protection of his providence Esther might have fallen under the sentence of that cruel law, which made the king inaccessible to his subjects. But her life was preserved by that God to whom she had poured out her soul in fasting. She did great things and prevailed; and her name shall live to the

latest posterity in the records of those heroes and heroines who "wrought righteousness, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

"Wherever this gospel is preached," said Jesus, "there shall also this that this woman (who poured precious ointment on his head) hath done be told for a memorial of her." Mordecai hoped that what Esther had done would be told in every succeeding generation, to her honour, and for the encouragement of women, as well as men, to do every thing in their power to promote the interests of the Church. Women are too ready to say, What can we do to serve the public interest? our mode of life confines us to our own families. But Esther is not the only woman that has gained just praises by her public spirit. Lemuel's mother taught her son to be a blessing to his people, and has left lessons behind her, by which women, to the end of the world, will be taught to excel in virtue. To Priscilla, as well as to Aquila, all the Churches of the Gentiles gave thanks for what she did for Paul; and many of them had reason to thank her for what she did to Apollos likewise. Males and females are one in

Christ Jesus. They are equally saved by his grace; they are equally obliged to promote his interests in the exercise of virtue, and the practice of duties suited to their respective situations; and women, as well as men, have sometimes found singular opportunities of service to their generation, which they could not safely neglect to improve.

Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur. The very name of these days afforded an useful lesson to the people of God, and might have afforded an useful lesson to their enemies. It appeared from the event of the lots, which gave name to this day, that although time and chance happen to all men, yet nothing is contingent to God. Chance is under his management, and those things which to us appear most accidental, are managed by his providence to accomplish his designs of mercy to them that love him, and of vengeance to his enemies. Why, then, should the friends of God give themselves any anxious trouble about the most uncertain events? The whole disposal of the lot is of him. Haman's lots directed his measure to his own destruction, and the salvation of Judah. —*Lawson.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 29—32.

IMPORTANT LETTERS.

This is the day of writing many letters, but it is not the day for writing those elaborate and important letters which were written in the days of our forefathers. Those letters live as masterpieces of composition. It would be difficult to collect letters now-a-days that would be worth printing. Here in these verses we have the record of important letters written by Esther the queen and Mordecai the Jew.

I. The importance of letters may be measured by the earnestness of the writers. Esther and Mordecai wrote with all authority, or with all strength, viz. of spirit and of speech, of affection and expression. We have so many letters to write now that we cannot put all our strength into every letter; but when letters are important, then we should seek to put forth all strength. Earnestness will show itself in writing as well as in speaking. If we desire people to read what we have written we must write with earnestness. This will give power to our compositions and distinctness to our utterances.

II. The importance of letters may be measured by the spirit of the writing. Esther and Mordecai wrote with words of peace and truth. Follow peace with all men. Speak the words of peace and of truth in letters. Good may

be done by letter-writing. Sometimes we have neither power nor opportunity to speak to a brother about his spiritual state. A letter affords a good vehicle for the word of warning and of instruction. A letter may reach and bless him that could not be reached by word of mouth. A letter written with earnestness and with prayer will often carry conviction to the soul. Much good has been thus accomplished, and still is this method of usefulness available. Words of peace and truth. Let such be the nature of our communications. Sincere utterances, truthful words. Our age wants such words. In this gabbling age words are too cheap. We ought to be as careful not to circulate false words as we are not to circulate bad coin. When will the great importance of words be rightly understood and estimated?

III. The importance of letters may be measured by the subject-matter of the communication. These letters of Esther and of Mordecai confirmed the days and the matters of Purim. They were on subjects of highest importance to the Jewish nation. They decreed for their souls and for their seed the matters of the fastings and their cry. The conflicts of the soul are subjects of the highest importance; but they are too often overlooked. In all ages materialism gains too much the ascendancy. Soul concerns are put in the background; the matters of the fastings and their cry are not deemed matters worthy of supreme attention. Still those letters that touch the essence of things are the most influential. The letters of the apostles hold a supreme position on this very account. Their subject-matter testifies to their divinity. They thus commend themselves as inspired to the unprejudiced mind. Let us read these New Testament epistles, for they are the most important of all letters.

IV. The essence of important letters will not be lost. These letters sent unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, have not been handed down, but we may be assured that all which is essential in those letters is preserved. The decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book. What book it is impossible to say. Certainly it does not seem satisfactory to declare in the Book of Esther, as forming part of the canonical books. If this be so, then this thirty-second verse and the tenth chapter do not properly belong to the inspired books. The verses are then a mere postscript, written by what hand and with what authority we cannot determine. To make the expression, "it was written in the book," an argument for the canonicity of Esther, is far-fetched. We may concur with Keil when he says, "The book in which this decree was written cannot mean the writing of Esther, mentioned in verse 29, but some written document concerning Purim which has not come down to us, though used as an authority by the author of the present book;" or we may refer it to the book of the Chronicles of Media and Persia, since it is mentioned in other passages. Though the written document is lost, yet the essence of the document remains. We may then believe that all which is worth preserving will be preserved and handed down from generation to generation. Let us not weep over burnt libraries and destroyed manuscripts. God watches over the truth. His Word cannot be destroyed. If all that had been destroyed could be gathered up again, if there could be a resurrection of dead books, and diligent inquiry made, we are persuaded that there would be no substantial addition to the treasury of the truth. The fire burns, but the gold and the silver of everlasting truth must outlast every conflagration.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 29—32.

And the decree of Esther confirmed, scribed. The like may be here said of &c. *Dux fœmina facti.* Money was Queen Esther; yea, we may add that in coined in the year 1588 in honour of the Gospel, spoken concerning another: Queen Elizabeth, with that posy in- Whenever this history should be read in

all the world, this that she hath done should be spoken to her eternal commendation.

And it was written in the book. Tremellius rendereth it thus: "When, therefore, the edict of Esther had confirmed these things, it was written in this book." Lyra and others thus: "She requested the wise men of that age, that they would reckon this history for Holy Writ." If it be meant of any other public record which the Jews then had, it is lost, as are likewise some other pieces which never were any part of the Holy Scriptures; for God, by his providence, ever took care and course that no one hair of the sacred head should fall to the ground. The unsound conceit of Pelican here is by no means to be admitted, viz. that this latter part of the chapter, from verse 25 to the end, came from the pen of some other man, not guided by the Spirit of God, and that because here is no mention made of praising God at this feast, or stirring up one another to trust in him. For we know that all Scripture is of Divine inspiration, and it is to be presumed that those things were done at such solemnities, though it be not recorded in each particular.—*Trapp.*

And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth. When we are exalted above our brethren, we are too ready to forget them and ourselves, as if the change of our condition had raised us to a higher rank of creatures. Mordecai and his adoptive daughter were not negligent in the exercise of their authority for purposes that appeared to them good and salutary to the nation; but they still retained their humbleness of mind, and their kind affections to their kindred. They sent these letters to all the hundred and twenty-seven provinces "with words of truth and peace;" with expressions of the warmest benevolence. Nor were these expressions, like many of our mutual compliments, merely dictated by a politeness which too often conceals a perfect indifference to our neighbour's welfare under good words and fair

speeches. Their words were words of truth as well as of peace, when they expressed their desires and prayers, that the Lord might bless his people with peace.

Let men maintain that authority which God hath given them, that they may attain the ends for which it is given them, but let it be always tempered with charity and gentleness. Paul, in his epistles, asserts his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ; but he writes with words of peace and truth when he prays for grace and peace to the churches from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. At the motion of Mordecai, the Jews were unanimously determined to observe the festival, and to enjoin the observance of it to their posterity. The Jews were confirmed in their resolution by the second letter of Mordecai, in conjunction with Esther. And one consideration which would dispose them to observe the commemoration of this deliverance with joy and exultation, was, that they had fasted and cried for it under the pressure of the danger. They could not eat their ordinary food. They cried out with exceeding loud and bitter cries. They fasted and cried unto the Lord, and he heard the voice of their supplications.

Spring is the pleasantest season of the year, because it follows the dreary desolations and the piercing cold of winter. These days of health are especially delightful which follow days of extreme sickness, when we had the sentence of death in ourselves. Remember the dismal thoughts that engrossed your minds, the terrifying apprehensions that embittered your troubles, and the exquisite felicity which you promised to yourselves, if it should please God, beyond your expectations, to send you relief. Thus will the troubles you have endured spread happiness in the retrospect, over the remaining part of your life. You

still must meet with trials ; but you will be thankful that they are so light and easy to be borne, when they are compared with those which you have formerly endured.

Have you fasted, and cried unto the Lord, and has he graciously inclined his ear to your complaints ? With what joy and peace ought you to recollect the mercy which has preserved you from going down to the chambers of the grave, perhaps to the regions of destruction ! David will teach you what improvement to make of your fasting and cries, when the Lord has been pleased to grant you the deliverance which you supplicated. " I love the Lord, because he heard my voice and supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him so long as I live. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me ; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord : O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous ; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple : I was brought low, and he helped me : I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim ; and it was written in the book. The high and beloved name of Esther was sufficient to establish the decree of Purim. She had been the saviour of the Jews. At the risk of her life she had preserved theirs. What do we not owe to him who, not only by endangering his life, but by giving up himself to an accursed death, hath delivered us from the wrath to come ?

" And it was written in the book " of the Jewish institutions, or in the register of their transactions. Books are necessary for recording those things that are intended for the use of posterity. Were it not for books we would all be children in understanding. Let us carefully improve those things that were written aforetimes for our learning, especially those things which Divine wisdom hath directed the holy men of God to record for our benefit.

The feast of Purim is still observed, though not in a manner agreeable to Esther's intention. The observance of this and other festivals of the Jews, from the most ancient times, is attended with this great advantage, that it affords a convincing argument of the truth of those facts which they were designed to commemorate, when we take this into the account, that these fasts were recorded in books at the time when they were instituted, which are still extant. The observance of the ancient Jewish feasts is a public declaration of their firm belief of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is one of the most powerfully rational arguments of the truth of our holy religion. If the Old Testament Scriptures are true, the Messiah expected by the Jews is come long ago into the world ; and none but Jesus of Nazareth can be that Messiah. Thus the most determined enemies of Jesus give a decided, though indirect, testimony that he is the Son of God, by attesting the truth and Divine authority of those ancient Scriptures that testify of him. —*Lawson.*

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES] *And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea*] Tribute—a levy, tribute-service—means a tax levied, and for this reason that tribute-service belonged to products or moneys which were rendered to the king. Keil thinks the author wished briefly to indicate at the close whence Ahasuerus derived the means to support such magnificent state as was described at the beginning of our book. But the only safe answer is given us by the manner in which the author, in ver. 2, connects the power of Ahasuerus with the greatness

of Mordecai: the greater the power of Ahasuerus, the more powerful the dignity of Mordecai. The land and the isles of the sea shows the extent of the monarch's sway. 2.] The author does not designate either the wealth or the power of Ahasuerus or of Mordecai more minutely, but rather refers for particulars on both to the archives of the empire of the Medes and Persians. It is enough for him to be able to refer to these, and it is especially honourable for Mordecai's cause, that even the archives of heathen kings must remember him. 3.] Here the author must once more give prominence to the fact that Mordecai, the Jew, who for him stands as the representative of Judaism, stood next to King Ahasuerus, since therefrom it follows that the greatness of the one was also that of the other. "The second" here means the first minister, and hence indicates that Mordecai was great among the Jews, and favoured among the multitude of his brethren, *i. e.* that he really occupied a representative position among them. The additional sentence also, **seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed**, is quite in place here, in so far as it indicates that what came to Mordecai also redounded to the good of his entire people. — *Lange*.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH. VERSES 1, 3.

A GOOD GOVERNMENT.

Happy the people that live under the government of Queen Victoria, for it is, upon the whole, the best government that the world has ever seen. There is the due balance of powers. There may be evils, but there are fewer evils than can be found in any other government, past or present. It is not contended that it is perfect, for perfection is not to be expected in this sinful, selfish, and imperfect world. How good our government is may be seen by instituting a contrast between it and some ancient forms. The Persian government was far from perfect. No one would desire to see it repeated. It is not here to be placed before us as a model. But it is possible for these verses to gather together some of the characteristics of a good government. Let each subject strive to mend himself, and seek the wealth of his people, and thus he will subserve the best interests of the state at large.

I. A good government has a wise system of taxation. This is needful for the purposes of government. Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. He could not have managed without such a tribute. It may have been oppressive. A larger tribute may have been exacted than was actually needful, for he was luxurious, and had to support many retainers. A certain outward state seems essential to royalty in order to maintain a proper position. The incidence of taxation should fall equally and justly upon all classes, and upon all parts of the empire. The rich can bear a proportionately larger tax than the poor. The absolute necessities of life should be free from taxation, as they are in Great Britain. Taxes ought to be freely paid, for this is the command of the New Testament. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," &c. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

II. A good government makes its power felt. Weak and changeable as was Ahasuerus, still it is found that he was capable of acts of power and of might. Every good government is powerful, both at home and abroad. It must be, and will be, a terror to evil-doers; for to this end are all governments instituted. We can easily conceive that governments would not be required if there were no evil-doers. How wonderful it is that this small island should be so powerful amongst the nations of the earth. It may be taken as a sign of God's favour to our nation. It becomes us to appreciate our blessings, and be careful not to abuse our privileges. We must endeavour to use our power for the glory of God and for the highest welfare of the nations of the earth. May God in his mercy still preserve our nation, and forgive our national wrong-doings, and make it a still greater power for good.

III. A good government places good men in office. At last Ahasuerus has a good man for prime minister. Ahasuerus advanced Mordecai to greatness. This

Jew became next unto the king. Mordecai was not a good man without capacity ; his piety was not a cloak for imbecility. A mere outward profession of goodness ought not to be the passport to high places, either in Church or in State. A pious fool may be as injurious to the state as a wicked philosopher. A man, in order to be prime minister, ought to be both intellectually and morally strong. From all that we read in this record, Mordecai appears to be the right man in the right place when he was placed next unto King Ahasuerus. Oh for truly good and great men sitting at the helm of affairs, both civil and ecclesiastical ! Men of commanding intellects, of noble hearts and true ; men that dare to be and to do the right ; men that shrink with abhorrence from all meanness and wrong-doing.

IV. A good government promotes the welfare of the people. Mordecai, as prime minister, sought and promoted the wealth or the welfare of his people, and through them the welfare of the people at large. This word "wealth" indicates a degenerating tendency. A man is now wealthy who possesses houses, lands, and money. Certainly outward prosperity will be the outcome of a good government. A country morally degenerate will not long remain prosperous. When vice increases, then the country declines ; so that a government must seek the suppression of vice and the development of virtue if it is successfully to promote the wealth of the people. Godliness is after all great gain, both to the individual and to the community. A good government cannot be atheistic. Infidel rulers cannot increase the wealth of the people in any respect. National safety must consist in national acknowledgment of the Divine supremacy. Fear God ; honour the king.

V. A good government strives to preserve peace. Mordecai, the prime minister, spoke peace to all his seed. We may be assured that the stern, repressive measures related in this narrative were intended for the promotion of peace and of the greater interests of the whole nation ; for Mordecai was not the man to speak peace while war was in his heart. It may be sometimes necessary while speaking peace to carry out those measures that appear contrary to pacific professions. "Blessed are the peacemakers." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." There are then limitations ; there are impossible men. Still, better to suffer a little than to destroy peace. But never let a so-called love of peace induce to the sacrifice of principle. The apostles were lovers of peace, but they produced hatred and commotion. The gospel is a pacificator, and yet it is a great divider.

VI. A good government is acceptable to a virtuous and enlightened people. Mordecai, the chief power in this Persian kingdom, was great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren. A government is firm as it is founded upon the respect and affection of the well-conducted portion of the subjects. We say well-conducted, for licentiousness spurns all government. Wickedness desires lawlessness ; rebellion is for the most part wickedness. Blessed is the fact that our throne is buttressed by so many faithful and attached subjects. God's government, rightly understood, will be acceptable to all people. It is a righteous government. In serving God we serve the best and most glorious King. Christ Jesus our King is wise, judicious, and loving. Happy are those who serve him on earth, and who shall be called to serve him when he shall have put down all opposing forces, and shall sway the glorious and beneficent sceptre of universal empire.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1, 2.

Mordecai was good, very good, for he did good. This goodness made him truly great, and then his greatness gave him an opportunity of doing so much the more good. When the king advanced him—1. He did not disown his people, the Jews, nor was he ashamed of his relation to them, though they were strangers and captives, dispersed and despised. Still he wrote himself Mordecai the Jew, and therefore no doubt adhered to the Jew's religion, by

the observances of which he distinguished himself, and yet it was no hindrance to his preferment, nor looked upon as a blemish to him. 2. He did not seek his own wealth, or the raising of an estate for himself and his family, which is the chief most aim at when they get into great places at court; but he consulted the welfare of his people, and made it his business to advance that. His power, his wealth, and all his interests in the king and queen he improved for the public good. 3. He not only did good, but he did it in a humble, condescending way; was so easy of access, courteous and affable in his behaviour, and spoke peace to all that made their application to him. Doing good works is the best and chief thing expected from those who have wealth and power; but giving good words is also commendable, and makes the good deed more acceptable. 4. He did not side with any one party of his people against another, nor make some his favourites, while the rest were neglected and crushed; but, whatever differences there were among them, he was a common father to them all, recommended himself to the multitude of his brethren, not despising the crowd, and spoke peace to all their seed, without distinction. Thus making himself acceptable by humility and beneficence, he was universally accepted, and gained the good word of all his brethren. Thanks be to God, such a government as this we are blessed with, which seeks the welfare of our people, speaking peace to all their seed. God continue it long, very long, and grant us, under the happy protection and influence of it, to live quiet and peaceable lives, in godliness, honesty, and charity!—*Matthew Henry.*

Whereunto the king greatened him. Whereunto the king greatened him; wherein he showed himself a wise and politic prince; as did likewise Pharaoh in advancing Joseph; Darius, Daniel; Constantius Chlorus, Christian officers; our Henry VIII., the Lord Cromwell, whom he made his vicar-general. Jovianus, the emperor, was wont to wish that he might govern wise men, and that wise men might govern him.

Justin Martyr praiseth this sentence of divine Plato: Commonwealths will then be happy when either philosophers reign or kings study philosophy. Jethro's justiciary must be a wise man, fearing God, &c. And that famous maxim of Constantius Chlorus, recorded by Eusebius, is very memorable: He cannot be faithful that is unfaithful to God, religion being the foundation of all true fidelity and loyalty to king and country.—*Tropp.*

“Mordecai, in order to vindicate the glory of God and his countrymen from the Hamanites, endured the hatred of many. He afflicted himself with fastings, prayers, sackcloth, cryings, and lamentations; he constantly spurned that impious man; and was at last adjudged to suffer on the ignominious cross. Now, however, by the singular favour of God, he is crowned beyond all men (Ahasuerus alone excepted) with glory and honour even in this world.”—*Fewardent.*

The concluding chapter of the Book of Esther refers to the greatness of Ahasuerus and his prime minister Mordecai. The king laid a tax upon every part of his dominions over which his power extended, both on the continent and on the islands under his dominion, which were all in the Ægean Sea. He did great things; but as it was not the design of the author of this history to record “the acts of his power and of his might,” reference is made by him to “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.” Where is this written record now? It has long since perished from the earth. Vast as was the empire of Persia itself, and apparently invincible, it fell, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel, before the power of Greece. Is it not strange that these chronicles should have perished, and that this mighty empire should have been overthrown, and yet that the records of the kingdom of God among men should have been preserved; and that kingdom itself should not only have stood amidst the revolutions of empires, but should now be spreading over the whole earth? Have we not another proof in this that God specially

guarded his own word from passing away from the earth? How otherwise should the Book of Esther not have shared the fate of the chronicles of Media and Persia? Have we not evidence also that his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom? How otherwise should it have withstood the assaults of its enemies, and not have suffered the fate of other empires? Books have perished by hundreds and thousands, but the oldest book is indestructible. The Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires have all had their day, and then been broken to pieces, but the most ancient kingdom of God among men is mightier than ever. As over that book we can read the words of its Divine Author, written, as though clasping it all, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away;" so, in the contemplation of his Church, we can sing in the language of an old prediction—

"Its walls, defended by his grace,
No power shall e'er o'erthrow;
Salvation is its bulwark sure
Against th' assailing foe."

There is next a high eulogy passed upon Mordecai the Jew, especially in relation to his own kindred and people. He was "great amongst them." Not the greatness merely of rank, station, and wealth, but highly esteemed also for those elements of character which constitute true nobility. He was "accepted of the multitude of his brethren." He did not despise them. He did not disown his own relationship to them. He set them an excellent example of integrity and virtue. And because of his goodness and humility, as well as his greatness and power, they honoured and loved him. He sought "the wealth of his people;" did not, like his predecessor in office, enrich himself at the public expense, but in all his acts consulted their welfare. He did not look upon his own things only, but also on the things of others. He identified himself and his own interests with them and theirs, and generously helped forward, and rejoiced in, their prosperity and happiness. He "spake peace to all his seed." He was accessible to all;

kind and courteous; not favouring one party above another, but endeavouring to unite all parties in the bonds of a common faith and hope; regarding with equal solicitude and concern the rich and the poor, and extending his sympathies to all sections of the community. We have surveyed him in different situations and circumstances—seated at the king's gate, and conscientiously resisting the king's commandment to pay religious homage to a man; rushing through the streets of Shushan with sackcloth and ashes, as though half frantic with vexation and fear, after Haman's iniquitous decree had been published; bravely counselling his cousin, and at her request spending three days in fasting and prayer; conducted through Shushan on the king's horse, led by his enemy, arrayed in the king's robe, and having the crown-royal upon his head; and afterwards formally installed in the office of Haman, and possessed of the king's signet-ring; but throughout all these changes in his outward circumstances he seems to have maintained the same character. It was not so much to find him humble, kind, and dutiful, when his position was less honourable and his life imperilled. The danger lay in his exaltation. There are not many who could preserve themselves from becoming vain, worldly, and inflated, when suddenly elevated from a comparatively humble position, to a place in a great empire, next to the king himself. But in his elevation those admirable qualities, which had formerly had but a limited sphere for their exercise, were made to shine forth conspicuously. Not only were they matured and strengthened, but took in the wide range of all his people, making him honoured and loved whilst he lived, for his humility, goodness, fear of God, and wise counsel; and, through Divine grace, fashioning for himself a name worthy of veneration by all subsequent generations. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."—*McEwen.*

Sir John Malcolm tells us that the sepulchre of Esther and Mordecai stands near the centre of the city of Hamadan.

It is a square building, terminated by a dome, with an inscription in Hebrew upon it, translated and sent to him by Sir Gore Ouseley, late ambassador to the court of Persia. It is as follows:—Thursday, fifteenth of the month Adar, in the year 4474 from the creation of the world, was finished the building of this temple over the graves of Esther and Mordecai, by the hands of the good-hearted brothers Eleas and Samuel, the sons of the deceased Ishmael of Kashon. The key of the tomb is always

in the possession of the head of the Jews resident at Hamadan, and, doubtless, has been so preserved from the interment of the holy pair, when the grateful sons of the captivity, whose lives they had rescued from a universal massacre, first erected a monument over the remains of their benefactors, and obeyed the ordinance of gratitude, in making the anniversary of their preservation a lasting memorial of Heaven's mercy, and the just faith of Esther and Mordecai.—*Bible Cyclopædia*.

ILLUSTRATIONS TO CHAPTERS IX., X.

The Alpine Travellers. Three tourists were ascending the Alps. After they had gone a considerable distance, and were getting nearer to the eternal snows, and thus the danger increased, it was considered necessary to attach the company by ropes to one another and to the guides. But one of the tourists, an old traveller, was self-confident and self-reliant. He carried the doctrine of self-help too far, and refused to help his neighbours. He fell down the precipice and lost his life. We often best help ourselves by helping others.

Mutual help, need of. As an apple in the hand of a child makes other children run after and consort with him and share his sports, so does he convert affliction, and the need we have of each other's aid, into a girdle of love, with which to bind us all together; just as no one country produces all commodities, in order that the different nations, by mutual traffic and commerce, may cultivate concord and friendship. How foolish they are who imagine that all the world stands in need of them, but they of nobody; that they know and understand all things, but others nothing; and that the wit of all mankind should be apprenticed to their wisdom.—*Gottbold*.

Whitfield. An old woman relates, that when she was a little girl Whitfield stayed at her father's house. He was too much absorbed in his work to take much notice of, and pay much attention to, the little girl. She did not remember any of his eloquent utterances. She was, however, observant, and noticed the great preacher when he did not think that any one was observing his conduct. And the impression made upon her mind by his holy and cheerful demeanour, by his patience under trials and difficulties, and his evident consecration to his work, was of a most lasting and salutary character. Well were it if all great preachers would preach at home! We must be great in the palace of home, and then let our influence work

outwards in all directions. Home religion is powerful.

The young Switzer. There was a young man among the Switzers that went about to usurp the government and alter their free state. Him they condemned to death, and appointed his father for executioner, as the cause of his evil education. But because Haman was hanged before, his sons (though dead) should now hang with him. If all fathers who had given an evil education to their sons were punished there would be a large increase of the criminal classes. At the present time the State is doing much in the way of educating; but the State cannot do that which is the proper duty of the parent. By precept, and even by the fear of penalty, should we enforce upon parents the duty of seeing faithfully to the true up-bringing of their children.

Faith of parents. An aged minister of Christ had several sons, all of whom became preachers of the Gospel but one. This one lived a life of dissipation for many years. But the good father's faith failed not. He trusted God that his wicked son, trained up in the way he should go, in old age should not depart from it. In this sublime faith the aged father passed away. Five years after, this son of many prayers sat at the feet of Jesus.

Influence of parents. The last thing forgotten in all the recklessness of dissolute profligacy is the prayer or hymn taught by a mother's lips, or uttered at a father's knee; and where there seems to have been any pains bestowed, even by one parent, to train up a child aright, there is in general more than ordinary ground for hope.—*The experience of a Prison Chaplain*.

Says the venerable Dr Spring: "The first afflicting thought to me on the death of my parents was, that I had lost their prayers."

Great men. Just as the traveller whom we see on yonder mountain height began his ascent from the plain, so the greatest man of whom the world can boast is but one of ourselves standing

on higher ground, and in virtue of his wider intelligence, his nobler thoughts, his loftier character, his purer inspiration, or his more manly daring, claiming the empire as his right.

—*Have.*

True greatness. The truly great consider, first, how they may gain the approbation of God; and, secondly, that of their own consciences. Having done this they would willingly conciliate the good opinion of their fellow-men.—*Cotton.*

The greatest man is he who chooses the right with invincible resolution; who resists the sorest temptations from within and without; who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully; who is the calmest in storms, and whose reliance on truth, on virtue, on God, is the most unflinching.—*Dr. Channing.*

Distinguishing great men. I think it is Warburton who draws a very just distinction between a man of true greatness and a mediocrity. "If," says he, "you want to recommend yourself to the former, take care that he quits your society with a good opinion of you; if your object is to please the latter, take care that he leaves you with a good opinion of himself."—*Cotton.*

Thus Mordecai was truly great, considering, first, how to gain the approbation of God; and, secondly, that of his own conscience. He rises above others by virtue of his wider intelligence, his nobler thoughts, his loftier character, and his more manly daring.

A good name. A name truly good is the aroma from character. It is a reputation of whatsoever things are honest, and lovely, and of good report. It is such a name as is not only remembered on earth, but written in heaven. Just as a box of spikenard is not only valuable to its possessor, but pre-eminently precious in its diffusion; so, when a name is really good, it is of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its aspiration. Mordecai's fame went out throughout all the provinces.—*Dr. J. Hamilton.*

Eastern hospitality. Nehemiah charges the people thus: "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." Also in Esther: "Therefore the Jews made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another." An Oriental prince sometimes honours a friend or a favourite servant, who cannot conveniently attend at his table, by sending a mess to his own home. When the Grand Emir found that it incommoded D'Arvieux to eat with him, he politely desired him to take his own time for eating, and sent him what he liked from his kitchen at the time he chose. So that the above statements must not be restricted to the poor.—*Paxton's 'Illustrations.'*

The heaviest taxes. "The taxes are indeed heavy," said Dr. Franklin on one occasion, and

if those laid on by the Government were the only ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly; and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing any abatement.

Safeguard of nations. France tried to go on without a God in the time of her first revolution; but Napoleon, for reasons of State, restored the Catholic religion. M. Thiers gives this singular passage in his history: "Napoleon said, 'For my part, I never hear the sound of the church bell in the neighbouring village without emotion.'" He knew that the hearts of the people were stirred by the same deep yearnings after God which filled his own, and so he proposed to restore the worship of God to infidel France. Later, and with deeper meaning, Perrier, successor to Lafayette as prime minister to Louis Philippe, said on his death-bed, "France must have religion" (*C. D. Fors*). So we may say, the nations, if they are to live, must have religion.

Punishment of nations. It was a sound reply of an English captain at the loss of Calais, when a proud Frenchman scornfully demanded, "When will you fetch Calais again?" "When your sins shall weigh down ours."—*Brooks.*

Nations. In one sense the providence of God is shown more clearly in nations than in individuals. Retribution can follow individuals into another state, but not so with nations; they have all their rewards and punishments in time.—*D. Custine.*

England's privileges.—It's the observation of a great politician, that England is a great animal which can never die unless it kill itself; answerable whereunto was the speech of Lord Rich, to the justices in the reign of king Edward VI.: "Never foreign power," said he, "could yet hurt, or in any part prevail, in this realm but by disobedience and disorder among ourselves; that is the way wherewith the Lord will plague us if he mind to punish us." Polydore Virgil calls Regnum Angliæ, Regnum Dei, the kingdom of England, the kingdom of God, because God seems to take special care of it, as having walled it about with the ocean, and watered it with the upper and nether springs, like that land which Caleb gave his daughter. Hence it was called Albion, *quasi* Olbion, the happy country; "whose valleys," saith Speed, "are like Eden, whose hills are as Lebanon, whose springs are as Pisgah, whose rivers are as Jordan, whose wall is the ocean, and whose defence is the Lord Jehovah." Foreign writers have termed our country the Granary of the Western World, the Fortunate Island, the Paradise of Pleasure, and Garden of God.—*Clarke's 'Examples.'*

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